The Construction of History and Nationalism in India

Textbooks, controversies and politics

Sylvie Guichard

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The Construction of History and Nationalism in India

Most studies on nations and nationalism argue that history, or more precisely a ‘common past’, is crucial for the process of national identity building. However, the existence of one or more concurrent narratives for the construction of this identity is often not accounted for, and there are cases where the ‘common past’ or a ‘collective memory’ is no longer shared.

This book centres on the construction, elaboration and negotiation of the narratives that have become official history in India. These narratives influence politics and the representation of the nation. Depending on the chosen definition of the nation, over 160 million Muslim Indians are either included or excluded from the nation, and considered as ‘foreigners from inside’. The author shows that beyond the antagonism of two representations of history, two conceptions of the Indian nation – secular and Hindu nationalist – confronted each other during the history textbook controversy between 1998 and 2004. The diverging elements of the two discourses are underlined, and surprising similarities are uncovered. Yet, in contemporary India this convergence remains overshadowed in political debates as the definition of the political has been shaped by the opposition between these two visions of the nation. This book analyzes and questions the conception of the school textbook as a tool of national construction and, more generally, highlights the complexity of the link between historiography, nation-state and nation-building.

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Sylvie Guichard
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Abbreviations

ACK	Amar Chitra Katha
AIBMM	All-India Backward Muslim Morcha
ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BJS	Bharatiya Jana Sangh
CABE	Central Advisory Board on Education
CAPEEM	California Parents for Equalization of Educational Materials
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
DPEP	District Primary Education Foundation
HEF	Hindu Education Foundation
HRD	Human Resource Development
ICHR	Indian Council of Historical Research
ICSSR	Indian Council of Social Science Research
IDRF	India Development and Relief Fund
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NCF 2005	National Curriculum Framework 2005
NCFSE	National Curriculum Framework for School Education
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NIEPA	National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SBAS	Shiksha Bachao Andolan Samiti
SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training
SFI	Students' Federation of India
UGC	University Grant Commission
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
VF	Vedic Foundation
VHP	Vishva Hindu Parishad

Abbreviations used for newspaper articles quoted in the text

In order to distinguish whether a reference concerns a newspaper article or a research paper, a book or an article in a book, references to newspaper articles are as follows: author's last name, year of publication and (abbreviated) name of the newspaper in which it was published. Not all newspapers' names have been abbreviated; those that have (because of their length or frequency of use) are listed below.

AT	Asia Times Online
CC	Communalism Combat
EPW	Economic and Political Weekly
FL	Frontline
GoI	Government of India
HT	Hindustan Times
IE	Indian Express
ITI	India Today International
Org.	Organiser
RoN	Rediff on the Net
TH	The Hindu
ToI	Times of India
TW	The Week

Introduction

Most studies on nations and nationalism see it as a truism that history or, more precisely, a 'common past' (invented or not for that matter) is crucial for the process of national identity building. Yet, if we are to confront theory with empirical cases, the alleged 'common past' is often far from being uncontroversially common. As a matter of fact, in many cases the purported 'common past' is not shared and is challenged by other competitive narratives. Despite this empirical reality, little attention has been dedicated to the existence of these competitive narratives and their consequences on the construction of national identity. This is precisely what this book is about: it will concentrate on the process of construction, elaboration and negotiation of what is to become official history. In order to follow up on this path of official history-building this book endeavours to investigate the many aspects of the Indian history textbook controversy. Accordingly, I will explore the specific interaction between the dynamics of nation-building, history teaching and school education in the postcolonial Indian state. The study of this case strives to address the following underlying research questions: how can we understand the controversy concerning the teaching of Indian history that arose during the BJP-led (Bharatiya Janata Party) government's term in office from 1998 to 2004? What were the stakes involved in these dissensions and, more particularly, how was the discourse on the Indian nation reflected, constructed and affected by this controversy?

Shortly after it formed the government coalition in 1998, the Hindu nationalist BJP announced that education should be 'Indianised, nationalised and spiritualised' (Muralidharan and Pande 1998 FL).[1] New subjects were introduced at the university level such as astrology and Vedic mathematics and the entire school curriculum was overhauled. Immediately, journalists, researchers and members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) severely criticized these reforms and accused the BJP of attempting to 'saffronize'[2] education. After the change in curriculum, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), which is the federal institution in charge of elaborating curricula, syllabi and textbooks, prepared new textbooks for primary and secondary classes. Public criticism of the new curriculum focused in particular on the history textbooks, pointing at the ideological bias they

contained. The main accusations concerned historical distortions by way of purposeful omission of important and meaningful historical events from the textbooks, the stigmatization of the Muslims as the main cause of India's misfortunes and the general glorification of everything related to Hinduism.

Thus, various campaigns were launched against the new history textbooks, mainly by the Communist party and Left-leaning historians. In 2001, polarization reached a climax when Arjun Singh, who was to take over as education minister under the Congress-led coalition government in 2004, accused the BJP of 'talibanizing' the writing of history.[3] The BJP defended itself by claiming that it had actually helped to free history from the vestiges of colonization: far from attempting to 'talibanize' education, the goal of its action was 'de-Macaulization' (Balakrishnan 2002 ToI).[4]

During the general elections in 2004, the BJP-led coalition lost to the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA). The latter took up the task of 'detoxifying' school education. For this purpose, it reappointed as heads of educational and research institutions scientists and historians known to be close to the Congress Party. These institutions then prepared a new curriculum and new textbooks.

Yet, the continuation of the debate and the virulence of the arguments employed by the opposing parties during this specific confrontation of ideas clearly indicate that the controversy was not due to the scientific and educational concerns of the government and its opponents regarding Indian history. It was caused, fuelled and sustained, instead, by deeply rooted, diverging conceptions of the Indian nation and of the nation's history. One group defended a secular historiography and conception of the nation and the other a Hindu nationalist one. Hence, the controversy offered a platform for the proponents of these two opposed views to redeploy or re-present their arguments. This is not to suggest that the arguments were new – on the contrary, they were not – but this redeployment allows for an exemplary reconstruction of these two concurrent visions of the nation and of history as well as the justifications advanced for defending such visions.

From the methodological point of view, the analysis presented in this book centres around two connected groups of arguments: the first inquires what the *points of divergences* are between the 'secularist' and the 'Hindu nationalist' historians. These historians propose concurrent narratives on the birth and development of the Indian nation-state. These two narratives lead to two different national imaginaries. The secularist and the Hindu nationalist historians were competing (and still are) to impose their conception as the official version of the past. The second line of arguments investigates the *points of convergence* of these two readings of history; even if they propose contradictory images of the past, both participate in the wider project of national construction. They are part of the grand narrative of the development of a modern and homogeneous nation-state.[5]

This being said, history narrated by secularists, just like the one narrated by Hindu nationalists, is inevitably fragmented. Both narratives of the nation-state

recount a coherent and linear evolution and development of the nation. As such, they both imagine the nation as a homogeneous entity. Hence both discourses, while producing some measure of uniformity, also result in the absence – or rather invisibility by absorption – of several categories of the population in their representation of history.[6] Most notably, Dalits,[7] women and the rural community disappear from history due to their absence from these national narratives.

Debate and perspectives

In her novel *In Times of Siege* (2003), Githa Hariharan relates the story of Shiv Murthy, a professor of history at the Kasturba Gandhi Open University. Shiv is inadvertently implicated in a controversy on the representation of Indian history when his course on Basava, the founder of a reform movement in medieval India, becomes the target of criticism by a group, claiming to defend history, called *Ithias Suraksha Manch* (Platform for the defence of history). This group accuses Murthy of treating Basava disrespectfully. The novel shows how an event from the past can suddenly become the focus of attention and how the controversy soon veers away from the historical object to take on a political tone with various organizations mobilizing themselves in support of one of the two positions. The author describes the atmosphere resulting from censure, the pressure exerted by the environment and the anxiety caused by the accusations (especially the accusation of being anti-national).

Hariharan portrays Shiv as an historian who tries to present a faithful picture of a complex and multidimensional past without seeking to use history to convey a particular message (either political or ethical). His detractors, on the contrary, are described as persons who look at history as an object that should correspond to their ideology and be a source of pride for Hindus. Hariharan paints the picture of a deserving (though rather mediocre) professor who has to face spiteful fundamentalists whose ranks are joined by all those who lack the courage to oppose them.

However illustrative the narrative of the aforesaid novel might be, I would like to distance myself from this type of Manichean reading of the controversy. To this end, I have treated both parties with the same seriousness without condemning either of them as a matter of principle. I have taken the stand of presenting different viewpoints as equitably as possible. This approach can be qualified as empathetic (Kakar 1996b: 3) as it is the expression of a sincere effort to understand each group's position.

At the same time, I have no intention to minimize the negative impact of the Hindu nationalist discourse. It has grave consequences as it encourages the stigmatization and exclusion of minorities in general and Muslims in particular and sometimes incites directly to violence. I do not wish to lighten the aggressiveness conveyed by some Hindu nationalist discourses, nor do I want to deny the symbolic and physical violence caused by these discourses, notably (but certainly not only) the destruction of the *Babri* mosque (*masjid*)

in Ayodhya in 1992, the pogroms in Gujarat in 2002, and the violence against Christians in Orissa in 2007 and 2008.[8]

Indeed, Hindu nationalism corresponds to what Billig (1995) calls 'hot nationalism'. It designates an often directly and openly violent expression of the nationalist phenomenon. In his book, Billig decided to concentrate on the less obvious but all-pervasive expressions of 'banal nationalism'. Its manifestations appear commonplace but they are, nonetheless, directly involved in the daily construction and reconstruction of national identities. Billig shows that, in general, scholars focus on the 'hot' rather than the 'banal' form and that the choice of such a focus has an impact outside academia as the 'banal' variety is not considered as nationalism any more. Billig's remark is also applicable for research on India. The attention of most researchers, including myself, has been drawn to hot nationalisms, mainly the Sikh and the Hindu nationalist projects. Secular nationalism has attracted less attention *as nationalism*. Studies on the Congress Party have rarely looked at it critically as projecting a form of 'janus-faced' nationalism. The Congress is often presented as a champion of positive secular nationalism associated with the struggle for independence. This leads to a situation where, in actual practice, secular nationalism is no longer deemed to be nationalism, the term 'nationalism' being used essentially to describe the most virulent form of this phenomenon.

During the history textbook controversy, the Hindu nationalist education project has been scrutinized with great concern by many different actors. This has sometimes resulted in over-interpretation. For instance, elements that existed already before the BJP's rise to power have been attributed to the party's desire to saffronize education. I hope that I have been able to avoid this pitfall, notably by comparing the situation and the textbooks before and after the changes introduced by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).[9]

To gain a better understanding of what happened and to hear the different points of view, I visited various government and private schools in Delhi, Gujarat and Rajasthan. I met and interviewed authors of the first two series of textbooks. I also met other historians and educationists who were to play a role in the third series of textbooks. I interviewed *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) members as well as people working for *Vidya Bharati* and volunteers of the *Ekal Vidyalaya* organization. However, most of the people involved in the debate were also active authors and, whenever possible, I refer to published (and easily available) material rather than to interviews.

NCERT textbooks, their diffusion and influence

The NCERT is the federal institution in charge of developing the curriculum and preparing model textbooks. Since 1961, the NCERT has produced three sets of textbooks:

- The first set of books was published at the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s. These books were used until 2002. I shall call them the 'old textbooks'.

- The second set was introduced between 2002 and 2004 when the NDA was in power at the Centre. It was replaced in 2005–6, which means that some of the textbooks were used only for a few months. I shall refer to this set as 'NDA textbooks'.
- The textbooks introduced after the 2004 elections by the UPA coalition government compose the third set. I shall refer to them as the 'UPA textbooks'.

This research is based mainly on the first two series of NCERT history textbooks and marginally on the third, as well as on the arguments advanced by the different actors to defend their reading of the past. I also analysed the wide range of writings produced around the controversy.

It is necessary to note here that in 2000 NCERT textbooks were used directly only by an estimated 10 to 15 per cent of schoolchildren. These books are prescribed mainly in central government or private schools (see Chapter 2). However, the impact of NCERT textbooks is not limited to students who use them directly, because these textbooks set the standard for what will be developed in each state.

However, between 1998 and 2005 the exemplary function of the 'model' textbooks was limited by the growing politicization of the curriculum's and textbook's elaboration processes. In 2001 after the publication of the 'NDA curriculum', several non-BJP states' governments announced that they would not follow this document. In 2002, Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of the Union Territory of Delhi, decided that the NDA textbooks would not be used in Delhi government schools.[10] Then, when the Congress-led coalition introduced the third set of textbooks, ministers of the states where the BJP was in power refused to accept the new curriculum and the change of textbooks.[11] Notwithstanding these cases of resistance, NCERT textbooks have a symbolic importance as material coming from a central institution: they constitute the official discourse and enjoy a greater visibility and credibility than textbooks produced by the State Textbook Boards.

It is nevertheless indisputable that a majority of students still use books printed by state governments. Given the limited distribution of these textbooks, it is all the more puzzling that so much attention was given to this debate, which can be an indicator of its 'national' significance. As one journalist observed in 2002:

> One out of three people in India cannot read or write. At least 100 million children are out of school. And 45 per cent of those who join school drop out before finishing even five years of basic schooling. And yet the shrillest education debate in this billion-plus nation today barely touches on any of these themes. Instead, it revolves around the rewriting of school history textbooks.
>
> (Lakshmi 2002 *Washington Post*)

Education is under the purview of the central and the states' governments.[12] This means that the states are empowered to modify the NCERT curriculum (as long as they remain within its basic framework) and can follow totally or partially the NCERT textbooks while elaborating their own teaching material. As regards the curriculum, it appears that the states most often do not use their autonomy in this area and follow the curriculum proposed by the NCERT with only a few modifications. As regards textbooks, it is difficult to determine to what extent the states borrow the contents of NCERT textbooks or deviate from them, but it seems quite usual for authors in the states to take inspiration from these textbooks or borrow some portions from their content.[13] However, in the early 1990s Edward Vernoff compared the NCERT history textbooks with the textbooks prepared by the state boards of Maharashtra, Gujarat, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The aim of this study was to determine whether government schools in India convey to students of Class VI to Class X an identical view of Indian history, or if this view differs from state to state. Vernoff analysed how the Indo-Aryan civilization, the Mughal Empire and the colonial period were presented in these books. His results suggest that more than half of the 21 books studied reflected the historical tradition of the state in which they were published (Vernoff 1992). Véronique Bénéï's research on schooling in Maharashtra also points to regional specificities as she shows the importance of Shivaji in the teaching of history in this state (Bénéï 2008: ch. 4). Because of these regional variations, even if this study focuses on the official narrative of the Centre, we should keep in mind that there are potentially 35 sub-narratives.

Moreover, in the period between 1998 and 2005 there have been several controversies about the content of history and social science textbooks at the states level. They were often linked with the 'federal debate' inasmuch as they had a saffronizazion/desaffronization component as was the case in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

Thematic, temporal and geographical frames

This study is neither a detailed analysis of the contents of the textbooks nor an evaluation of the impact of these contents on the students. It is also not a comment on the educational qualities of these books. It is an analysis of the debate on the representation of history in school textbooks. However, the topic dealt with here goes beyond the thematic frame (controversy on the history textbooks), beyond the temporal frame (1998–2004) and the geographical frame (India) selected for the present study. First, the debate on the teaching of Indian history concerns issues that were already controversial before the revision of the textbooks; they relate to topics such as the Ayodhya mosque, the origin of the Indo-Aryans, the interpretation of Muslim invasions and the place to be accorded to some figures and organizations in India's independence struggle. The discussions on the contents of the textbooks were

a reflection, although partial, of the historiographical disagreements that have stirred public opinion in India during the last 50 years.

Second, the controversy relates to events preceding 1998, in particular to the episode of the Janata government and to the measures taken by the states in which the BJP has been in power since 1992 (Chapter 2). Moreover, it did not end in 2004 given that the Congress-led coalition put in place an education policy that ran contrary to the one pursued by the BJP: the BJP had 'saffronized' the textbooks, the Congress sought to 'desaffronize' them. However, this research focuses mainly on the years from 1998 to 2004.

Third, the disagreements regarding the representation of Indian history transcended India's borders and reached California towards the end of 2005. This was the time when, during the revision of Californian social science textbooks, groups holding views similar to those defended in the Indian debate found fault with the representation of India's past in the books prescribed in California's schools. The same points were discussed, similar problems were raised and comparable accusations were levelled. This episode will be presented briefly but the analysis concentrates on the events and opinions expressed in India.

Besides, this book is about the Indian debate, but India's experience is not isolated. In many countries, there have been similar debates regarding the contents of school textbooks and, particularly, the manner in which history is presented to schoolchildren.[14]

Overview

This book is divided into five chapters. In Chapter 1, I present the theoretical framework of the analysis. I take up synthetically the different theoretical approaches of the nation and nationalism before concentrating on the constructivist conception. I distinguish two types of discourse about the nation that correspond to secular and religious nationalism. These two types of discourse are found in India in the form of a secular nationalist and a Hindu nationalist discourse. I then briefly describe the evolution of these discourses and the main groups who advocate them (i.e. the Congress Party and the Communist Party vs. the *Sangh Parivar*). After that, the analysis turns to history and how the two above-mentioned narratives are rooted in conflicting representations of Indian history.

Chapter 2 brings the role of the school into the analysis. It examines how the Indian school system is organized and, particularly, what the conception of textbooks in this system is. It then focuses on the first set of history textbooks and its secular nationalist interpretation of history.

Chapter 3 describes the origin and the development of the controversy that began with the publication of the first series of NCERT textbooks. It withered away after some time to come back to centre stage between 1977 and 1979. It then reappeared some 12 years later in some states and, since 1998, at the central government level. There, it first concerned the change of curriculum

and continued with the rewriting of the history textbooks. With particular reference to these textbooks, this chapter turns to the historiographical issues over which the participants in the debate opposed each other until 2004 when the government changed. This was, however, not the end of the debate, which was re-opened one year later in California.

Chapter 4 concentrates on the two opposing groups and their institutional and political affiliations. The structure of the argument that opposed these two camps, their conception of history and its significance in imagining the nation are analysed. The Hindu nationalist discourse revolves around the idea of the enemy (colonial, communist and Muslim) while the secular discourse is based on the idea of defence (of secularism, tolerance and reason) against the assault of Hindu nationalism. Yet, whereas these two discourses are in opposition in what regards the image of the nation they transmit, they are situated in the same context; they work with the same categories and share common presuppositions. They are situated within the grand narrative of the nation-state, of modernization and progress, but they propose different versions of it.

Chapter 5 develops further the convergences between the two narratives. The successive curricula and the two series of textbooks share an upper caste, urban and masculine perspective. The corollary of this perspective is the absence or invisibility (which is studied through the textbooks' iconography) of 'Untouchables' or Dalits, of tribals or Adivasis,[15] peasants and the countryside in general as well as the quasi-absence of women as social actors. Accordingly, the two series of history textbooks construct a homogeneous nation whose imagery is mainly masculine, urban and upper caste. The rivalry between the secularist and Hindu nationalist readings of the past has concealed other tensions and ideas regarding history and the nation. I devote some space to counter-arguments derived from these alternative concepts about the nation and history. They enable us to resituate this conflict into a wider context and to bring back in what it obliterates.

1 Nation, religion and history

Discourse, nation and nationalism

A discursive conception of the nation and nationalism

Since this book is about the contemporary representations of the Indian nation, it is necessary to clarify where I stand within the fragmented field of research on nations and nationalism. Anthony D. Smith distinguishes five approaches in the studies on nationalism depending on the answers given by researchers to the questions 'What is a nation?' and 'When is a nation?' (Smith 1998: 223). He makes a distinction between the primordialist, perennialist, modernist, ethnosymbolist and postmodernist approaches.

The 'common denominator' of scholars upholding a primordialist approach is 'their belief in the antiquity and naturalness of nations' (Özkirimli 2000: 64). The perennialists believe as well that the nation has been there since time immemorial, but they differentiate themselves from the primordialists by affirming that nations do not constitute natural phenomena but historical and social phenomena (Grosby 1991; Hastings 1997; Llobera 1994).

The modernist approach sees the nation as a phenomenon that appeared at the end of the eighteenth century. Its development resulted from changes brought about by modernization such as industrialization and capitalism (Anderson 1999; Breuilly 1996; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 2000). In this view, nationalism replied to functional needs of modernizing societies. As for the ethnosymbolists, they too believe that the emergence of the nation is a modern phenomenon, but they differ from the modernists by stressing the nation's premodern origins. Anthony D. Smith coined the term 'ethnosymbolism' and is the main defender of this approach (see also Armstrong 1982; Hutchinson 1987 and 2005). He recognizes that there is too much discontinuity between premodern and modern communities to assert that modern nations are the result of incremental changes that took place in the former. However, according to this scholar, 'there is considerable evidence that modern nations are connected with earlier ethnic categories and communities and created out of pre-existing origin myths, ethnic cultures and shared memories' (Smith 1996: 385).

The fifth position identified by Smith is the postmodern one. But under this heading, he brings together studies influenced by historical or epistemic

postmodernism *as well as* methodological postmodernism.[1] According to historical postmodernism, the modern period is over or has, at the least, undergone profound changes: a new environment, characterized at the same time by movements of globalization and regionalization, influences the development of nations and nationalism. Studies adopting a methodological postmodernist approach stand out due to the philosophical and methodological assumptions of their authors. These scholars contest in particular the existence of *a reality* that can be represented through the use of language and of an objectivity that is not socially constructed. As far as nationalism is concerned, methodological postmodernism insists on the processes of construction of a particular sort of identity. The role of the analyst following such an approach is to deconstruct the processes of identification in order to understand how it is produced, how and why people adhere to such a discourse (Walker 2001: 621).

Although the classification proposed by Smith is useful to disentangle the burgeoning of this field of research, it is not unanimously accepted by researchers (for a critical analysis, see Özkirimli 2000: 212–19). Furthermore, it is necessary to point out that these approaches enjoy very different status in the on-going academic debate where defenders of the primordialist position have become an endangered species. In contrast, this understanding dominates outside academic circles and forms the core of nationalist discourses (Gil-White 1999; Özkirimli 2000: 67). The contemporary academic debate is mainly between modernists, ethnosymbolists and postmodernists. The stress put by ethnosymbolists on the ethnic origins of nations is, however, deemed by some to be a primordialist or perennialist element (Gellner 1996: 366). According to ethnosymbolists, the nation develops from its ethnic roots, which constitute the essence of that particular nation. From this point of view, they can be considered as essentialists, just like the primordialists and perennialists.

Essentialism means 'a reduction of the diversity in a population to some single criterion held to constitute its defining "essence" and most crucial character. . . . It is common to assume that these cultural categories address really existing and discretely identifiable collections of people' (Calhoun 1997: 18). In contrast, constructivism rejects any essentialism in social organization and focuses on the study of the production, development, evolution and interrelations of social differences and social categories (Schwandt 1994). This approach is concerned with systems of representation, social practices and discourses.[2] Applied to the study of nationalism, this frame of analysis emphasizes the intersubjective character of the process of national identity formation (Özkirimli 2000: 217). However, to say that national identities are socially constructed is only a starting point. It is then necessary to clarify how, and what 'construction' exactly means. Does it mean free invention or, rather, rearranging pre-existing elements? Here disagreements begin.

In the following section, I will clarify how I conceptualize the nation within the broad frame of constructivism and what are, according to me, the limits

of construction. This conception can be summarized in three propositions. First, the term 'nation' does not represent a substantial entity; it is an element of categorization. Second, the nation is considered as an idea that is being continuously reconstructed by discourse. Finally, the idea of nation-building is *not* limited to the instrumentalization of this category by the political elite. I will take up these three elements and discuss them in the following paragraphs.

First, nations should not be conceptualized as substantial entities.[3] According to Brubaker, the term 'nation' is too often used as representing a real community. In doing this, one treats a category as a group. What distinguishes a group from a category is the interaction between its members: members of the same category are brought together by classification, but that does not mean that they interact, while the members of a group do interact (Brubaker 2002: 168–9).[4] By treating a category as a group, that is called 'nation' in this case, the members of this category believe that they belong to a homogeneous group (Bourdieu 1991). Anderson argues along the same line when he claims that the nation is '*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (1999: 6, italics in the original). This mobilization around one of the elements of categorization can lead to its crystallization and it can even strengthen the links between some members of this category that might become a group.

Second, the nation is regarded as a process, an idea that is being continually reshaped *by discourse*. Narratives are by nature performative (Austin 1965; Searle 1991: 255); they produce what they describe (Bourdieu 1991). Hence, the discourse on national identity produces the nation. The nation is what is said about it (saying being understood in a very wide sense in this case). The assertion that the nation is not a natural reality, but that it is built through narratives does not mean that the consequences of this imagined community are not real. The discourse on the nation makes it 'real'. The reality of the nation and the strength of the feelings it inspires do not depend on the existence of a substantial group or a substantial nation, but on the discourse on this group (Brubaker 2002: 168).

It is necessary to point out the distinction between the terms 'discourse' and 'narrative'. I do not understand the term 'discourse' in the narrow literal sense, but in a wider sense as 'systems of meaning, including all types of social and political practice, as well as institutions and organisations' (Howarth 1995 quoted in Mottier 2000: 536). In contrast, the term 'narrative' is used in the narrower sense of a story. Accordingly, '[s]pecific narratives of the nation are construed as important component parts of broader discourses of national identity' (Mottier 2000: 537).

Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson make a distinction between two concepts of narrativity: the first, which is older, is *representative* and the second, which is more recent, is *ontological* (see also Lyotard 1979: 35–53). The representative concept views the narrative only as a form given to the chaos

of experiences by social and human sciences in order to make some sense of this chaos. But narrativity is also considered as much more, as an 'ontological condition of social life' (Somers and Gibson 1996: 38). Narrativity is not, therefore, simply a method of representing reality. It is also a component of this reality.

> [S]tories guide action; . . . people construct identities . . . by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; . . . 'experience' is constituted through narratives; . . . people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate these happenings within one or more narratives; and . . . people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives.
>
> (Somers and Gibson 1996: 38–9)

The different aspects of identity are thus made up of narratives. One of these narratives is about the nation and constitutes national identity. Through narrations, we understand the social world and it is only by situating ourselves within these social narratives that we can build our own identity (Taylor 1994).

Third, the (performative) discourse does not emerge in a world devoid of previous social constructions. For this reason, my understanding of the concept of nation distances itself from the instrumentalist dimension of some constructivist studies that conceptualize the nation as resulting from manipulation by the elite of mobilizing themes with the aim of increasing their own power. Several scholars developed and defended this idea that the nation is a 'tool' used by the elite to attain their end (Brass 1974; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; for a critical assessment, see Fearon and Laitin 2000). These studies envisage the instrumentalization of national identity as a 'top-down' process; this is what Maleševi (2002: 210) calls 'power elite approaches'. The reverse bottom-up instrumentalist approach exists also but has few representatives. It is supported principally by authors (who are not constructivists) who subscribe to the theory of rational choice. Very roughly summarized, the core idea suggests that individuals use their membership in an ethnic group according to the advantages they can gain from it (i.e. Hechter 1987; for a critical analysis, Maleševi 2002).

However, I believe that the instrumentalization and manipulation (whether top-down or bottom-up) of the idea of the nation are limited by several factors. A person's (national) identity is the result of two processes (exo-identification and self-identification) that influence each other and that are part of a certain 'discursive context' (Suny 2001: 868). An identity is conferred on us by others (this is exo-identification) and we also 'choose' or identify with an identity (this is self-identification). In the interaction between these two processes, exo-identification weighs more than self-identification. The freedom to self-identify

is restricted, first, because in the life of an individual self-identification intervenes after one has been socialized with a certain exo-identification and, second, because the social ratification of the 'chosen' identification is necessary. For example, even if a person decides to identify herself as Basque, it is not enough to make her a Basque. It is necessary that other Basques recognize her as 'one of them'. This dual process and the fact that it fits within a particular cultural context limits, on the one hand, the elite's room for manoeuvre because individuals must be able to identify themselves with the proposed (or imposed) representation and, on the other hand, people's freedom to choose their identity according to projected benefits.

Instrumentalist and constructivist views often go together: since identities are formed, they can be used by the elite to safeguard their influence. It should, however, be clarified that though instrumentalists subscribe to constructivism, constructivists are not necessarily instrumentalists because manipulation by the elite is only one of the processes that can be used for a nation's social construction. This could be the result of the efforts of individual agents or of economic and social processes or even of discursive practices (Fearon and Laitin 2000). At the individual level, national identity is not always a result of manipulation but can also be (re)produced by the daily actions of ordinary persons (Billig 1995). At the meta-individual level, the need for national construction might be felt after socioeconomic changes as shown by Benedict Anderson (1999), Karl Deutsch (1953) and Ernest Gellner (1983). National construction could also depend on discursive practices or symbolic and cultural systems. Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 16) observe that national identity can be the 'anonymous' product of a particular discursive environment that shapes our way of thinking and our understanding of the world. Consequently, even if it can be the case, the idea of construction should not be limited to actors having a conscious and clearly defined or practical desire to identify with, or manipulate, a particular category.

This leads us to a difficult question, as to identify the constructed and contingent nature of the nation does not explain its power. Why do people feel attracted to such a discourse, why do they follow nationalist movements? If we do not adhere to the two extreme hypotheses of people either being victim of manipulation or freely choosing a national or ethnic identity because they will gain from it, what is left as middle path? I argue that nationalist discourses are anchored in a certain cultural milieu that limits invention. However, this does not imply that the context is static. The elements can be rearranged, some can be emphasized and others forgotten (see Wimmer 2002: ch. 1); these elements are the building blocks (Motyl 1999), the symbolical repertoire with which people live.[5]

Nations are socially and historically constructed and contingent because the assemblage could have been done differently; which elements are chosen and how they are reformulated depends on the 'power structure' (Wimmer 2002: 36). To explain how nations appear and how they appeal to people, the use of verbs such as 'to do' and 'to construct' evoke conscious human agency. This

way of speaking about the nation brings to mind a strong version of the instrumentalist approach of elites consciously fabricating nations. Yet, as I have argued, it might be so in some cases but nationalism cannot be reduced to elites making up a discourse and people blindly following.

Then does all that allow us to reply to the question 'what is a nation?' more precisely than saying that it is a social category that people take as a group because of the type of discourse uttered about it and that this discourse is inscribed in a social and cultural context? We certainly need one more step: what makes up a national narrative or, more broadly, what is the national discourse all about, and why do people relate to 'their nation'? According to Hobsbawm, a nation is 'any sufficiently large body of people whose members regard themselves as members of a "nation"' (Hobsbawm 1992: 8). Yet, following Alexander J. Motyl (1999), I add that if people consider themselves to be part of a nation it implies that they hold certain propositions about 'their nation' to be true. According to Motyl, the necessary common propositions relate to the nation's origins and boundaries. Moreover, in order to distinguish between nation and ethnic group, one more element is necessary when trying to keep only the skeleton of nationalist discourse: this discourse postulates congruence – either achieved or desired – between nation and a certain kind of modern territorial state (Kohl 1998: 226).

The discourse on the nation is a product of nationalism. Nationalism has been analysed as a movement (Breuilly 1996), an ideology (Freeden 1998; Sutherland 2005), a discourse (Sutherland 2005) and a feeling (Verdery 1996).[6] I believe that these different perspectives are not antithetical because nationalism is all this at one and the same time. These four elements are closely linked: a political movement defends an ideology with the help of a discourse, which can be used to arouse certain sentiments. Nationalism may be defined as 'the political utilization of the symbol nation through discourse and political activity, as well as the sentiment that draws people into responding to this symbol's use' (Verdery 1996: 227). The nationalist discourse portrays the nation as being threatened and needing protection. In this view, nationalism is a movement defending a so-called nation. Nationalist feelings constitute a form of belonging and devotion to the nation.

Hence nationalism represents the movement, the ideology, the sentiments and the discourse leading to the reification of the idea of the nation. The analysis of the nationalist discourse attempts to show how this reification takes place. Nationalism results, therefore, in the reification of the nation through various practices and processes. The institutionalization of some categories and day-to-day practices (Billig 1995) as well as the discourse of 'political entrepreneurs' (Brubaker 2002: 166) contribute to this reification. Groups are built by calling them as such and by invoking them in cases where there were no homogeneous groups to start with, but only categories (Brubaker 2002: 169–71).

Nationalist claims are based on the argument that the members of the nation share certain qualities – cultural, linguistic, ethnic or religious. The common

quality invoked enables us to distinguish between different types of nationalist discourses (according to the central element of the discourse at a given time, for example linguistic or religious nationalism).[7] Each type also appeals to other themes, but they do not form the core of the discourse. The common attributes to which the discourse refers do not, however, represent objective qualities that would allow a neutral observer to draw the boundaries of the alleged nation. They are only elements of categorization around which the discourse on the nation is built. The difference therefore lies in the element of categorization mobilized in the discourse and around which identity is built.

The term 'nationalism' is generally used to describe two sociopolitical phenomena. The first concerns the action undertaken by the nation's members to obtain a certain amount of political sovereignty, while the other describes the attitude adopted by the members of an alleged nation when they are worried about their national identity (Miscevic 2005). The first phenomenon corresponds to what Brubaker calls 'state-seeking nationalism' (2000: ch. 4). This scholar uses this term in relation to nationalist movements whose members wage a struggle for 'their nation's' political autonomy. As regards the second phenomenon, it concerns nationalist movements that no longer seek to establish a state or fight for 'their nation's' autonomy, but hope to establish an identity between the existing state and their idea of a nation to which, they believe, this state corresponds only imperfectly. Brubaker puts together movements of this type under the heading 'nation-shaping nationalism', since their aim is to nationalize the state.

In countries that have been colonized, nationalist movements started as 'state-seeking' and became 'nation-shaping' after decolonization. Several studies show that two models of states and societies are opposed to each other in this nation-shaping process: one model is based on secular principles while the other is based on religious principles.

Modernization, religion and nation

In the 1960s and the early 1970s, theories of modernization/secularization interested in the changes taking place in the newly independent countries foresaw the decline of religion in these societies. While modernizing themselves, these societies were to become secular (Apter 1965; Deutsch 1953; Kautsky 1972; Smith 1970, 1971, 1974). It was expected that institutions founded on secular principles would replace traditional institutions rooted in religion. Modernization was supposed to make the state and political society the basis of individual allegiance. However, faced with the intra- and interstate conflicts based on religious arguments that broke out in the late 1970s, several researchers discredited the hypothesis of the decline of religion propounded by theories of modernization. They supported instead the idea of a resurgence of religion not only in the former colonies but also in the West.[8]

Research on religious nationalism concentrates on a particular aspect of this alleged resurgence: the movements whose discourse links together the nation, state and religion. Many of these religious nationalist movements emerged during the second half of the twentieth century, mostly in ex-colonies, following changes in their social structure. The principal causes advanced to explain this phenomenon are the disruption of traditional solidarities (which leads to social and cultural fragmentation) due to modernization, the struggle against state-imposed secularization and the people's unfulfilled and disappointed expectations of gaining political freedom, economic prosperity and social justice after decolonization.[9] This gave rise to a feeling of lack of individual benchmarks and led to a loss of confidence in the type of state advocated by secular nationalism. Religious movements then proposed an alternative political and social organization reintegrating individuals into community systems based on religion.[10] These analyses observe the growing opposition between two models of organizing the state and the nation, one based on a secular conception and the other on religious principles (Friedland 1999, 2001; Haynes 1997; Juergensmeyer 1993; Westerlund 2002). The failure of the Western secular model, generally advocated by the decolonized countries' former rulers, has encouraged the development of religious nationalism and enabled it to find a vast audience.

According to Juergensmeyer, religious nationalist movements not only reject the Western secular model of state and society, but they also consider its acceptance as a symbol of Western domination. However, Western countries are not the prime target of these nationalist movements. The core of the conflict is often confined within the society and opposes different views about the nation and different models of society. The goal of religious nationalist movements continues to be first and foremost the regeneration of their nation.

Researchers do not accept unanimously the hypothesis of religious resurgence. Jeff Haynes is of the opinion that political manifestations of religion since the 1970s do not constitute a revival but are just a continuation: 'religion in the Third World is the ideology of opposition *par excellence*; thus in the contemporary era, there is no religious resurgence; instead, it never went away' (Haynes 1997: 715). This author believes that religion has been used by political oppositions, particularly against colonial domination since the early twentieth century. He stresses, for example, the nationalist movements in Algeria, Egypt and Indonesia, which, during the 1920s and 1930s, based their claims mainly on their adherence to Islam.

Yet, whatever the position adopted towards the resurgence of religion, two types of discourses on the nation confront each other in 'developing' as well as in 'developed' countries: one can be referred to as a *secular nationalist* discourse and the other one as a *religious nationalist* discourse. This distinction does not propose essential types but heuristic categories. Secular nationalism bases its discourse on arguments referring to political principles and common institutions. It marginalizes religion by confining it to the private domain and

lets the state define the principles of social organization. Religious nationalism defends a conception of the nation and the state based on religious principles. It is a type of discourse that puts religion at the core of its definition of national identity, making the sharing of a certain faith the criterion of inclusion or exclusion in the nation. In other words, only persons belonging to a particular religion are a part of the nation.

Although it might be true that the religious nationalist discourse can be brought closer to an ethnic type of discourse on the nation, which founds the nation on a birth-related determinism, on a criterion of ethnic descent or on factors such as language and religion, while the secular nationalist discourse is closer to a nationalist discourse described as civic, I will not take up this classical dichotomy (or ideal-typical distinction) between civic and ethnic nationalism.[11] My aim is not to conceptualize my 'object' of study as different types of fixed nationalism but as *different discourses* on the nation. These discourses use the same symbolic resources (history, culture, and political institutions), but talk of them in different ways.

Some precisions are necessary here on the fuzzy conceptualizations of the link between religion and nationalism.[12] They have often been seen as rivals, as opposed to each other (as in the theories of modernization). They might have been opposed in phases of transition as Anderson (1999) argues, the one replacing the other. In the same perspective of 'substitution', they have sometimes been conceptualized as functional equivalent; nationalism being analysed as a civil religion (see Bellah 1967 and Durkheim 1964). However, as Steven Grosby notes, even if there are elements of transcendence or religiosity in nationalism, the distinction between these two notions remains necessary because their articulation varies (Grosby 2001: 106). In some instances, religion reinforces nationalism whereas in others it undermines it, but the idea that nationalism would replace religion seems to have lost favour at the same time as the theories of modernization. Nowadays, I would rather argue that the one strengthens the other. Moreover, I agree with Anthony Smith that all nationalist discourses have a significant religious component as nationalism is based on cultural and historical elements in which the influence of religion is always present (see, in particular, Smith 1999a, 1999b and 2000).

Then, if nationalist discourses have a religious tint, why distinguish a religious and a secular nationalism? Is it just a question of having more or less religious elements in the discourse? It seems to me that the decisive point is rather *what role* the religious elements play in the discourse. The distinction between secular and religious nationalism is important and necessary because secular nationalism defines the limits of the nation mainly on non-religious elements whereas religious nationalism defines who is included and excluded according to religious criteria. This distinction is based on the type of elements used to define the boundaries of the nation as well as the central element around which the discourse is articulated. Regarding Hindu nationalism, it is for this reason that I prefer to speak about religious rather than cultural nationalism.

Different discourses on the nation in India

In India, there are conflicting discourses on national identity and, consequently, several representations of the Indian nation coexist in a competitive relationship. These representations divide the members and non-members according to different criteria. Disagreement about these criteria exists mainly between those who believe in a secular definition of the nation and those who support a religious definition (Jaffrelot 1995a; Khilnani 1997; Varshney 1993 and 2002: ch. 3).

Hindu nationalism defines the nation's boundaries by adopting adherence to a particular religion as criterion. As such, Hindu nationalism has made the unification of Hindus central to its mission (I will come back to this below). This unification is seen as a necessity against 'enemies' threatening the Hindu nation: Muslims and Christians as well as the West or, rather, the Westernization of values and the Western way of life. This type of discourse is opposed to another type of national construct, namely the Indian nation whose membership is based on citizenship and that makes no distinction between citizenship and nationality. According to this conception, the Indian nation consists of equal citizens whose religious practices appertain to the private sphere. The Hindu nationalist discourse presents an ethnic view of nationality and the secularist discourse defends an essentially territorial view.[13] In the Indian context, Hindu nationalism is often also called communalism while non-denominational nationalism is called secularism. I will show how these two discourses on the nation are linked to two political actors, the Congress and the BJP.

Secularism and the Congress's changing discourse

In India, the term secularism is not understood as a strict separation of religion from the state (what is designated in French as *laïcité*). Its practice is generally described – in a somewhat simplistic manner – as the state engaging equally with all religions. There is not a separation but equidistance between the state and religion.[14] Keeping at equidistance or engaging equally with all religions is certainly a perilous position to realize for the state. Besides, I stressed the simplification of the formulation because secularism establishes compromises between several values and that makes the concept unstable but adjustable. This practice looks for a path that allows respect for the freedom of religion, which more or less implies non-interference in the affairs of communities, and at the same time insists on equality and justice, calling for intervention regarding some social customs based on religion (Bhargava 2007: 135). This requirement gives rise to 'contextual secularism' that respects the maintenance of what Bhargava calls 'principled distance', which is to be distinguished from equidistance: 'In the strategy of principled distance, the state intervenes or refrains from interfering, depending on which of the two better promotes religious liberty and equality of citizenship' (Bhargava 1998a: 515).

Several Indian intellectuals have expressed doubts about the desirability of applying the principle of secularism to the Indian political system because of what they believe is its essentially Western nature. Ashis Nandy even sees the imposition of this concept on the Indian political system as being the source of communalism, which is only, according to this view, a counter-movement or a movement of opposition to secularism.[15] This attack against one of the founding principles of the Indian state prompted many intellectuals to reply. They assessed and recognized the difficulties linked with this practice but they also defended it as guaranteeing the necessary space for individuals to follow their religious practices.[16] Thus Béteille put forward that secularism 'is non-religious rather than anti-religious', which means that '[i]t is not committed to any total or complete plan or organisation for the whole of society in terms of a single consistent principle' (Béteille 1994: 566).

After Partition, India declared itself a secular state, unlike Pakistan, which became an Islamic republic. The principle of secularism, even though it was added in the Constitution only in 1976,[17] was the very foundation of the political discourse advanced by Nehru to bring together the population of the newly independent state torn apart by 'communalist' tensions after the violence unleashed by the country's partition. In fact, Nehru had to face at that time the communalism present not only in organizations such as the *Hindu Mahasabha* and the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS – Association of National Volunteers), but also within the Congress Party.[18] The Congress included in its fold people of diverse tendencies ranging from supporters of a strictly secular nationalism to those supporting traditionalism and even Hindu nationalism (Graham 1988; Jaffrelot 1995a: 224–34). Before Partition, a group within the party, represented notably by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, was sympathetic to the ideas of Hindu nationalists.[19] After Partition and the spread of the 'two nation theory' advocated by Mohammed Ali Jinnah (according to which British India consisted of two nations, one Hindu and the other Muslim), some members of the Congress Party felt that this theory should also be applied in India. Hence, they proposed a Hindu understanding of Indian nationality. At the same time, Nehru advocated a secular conception of the nation. The shock caused by Gandhi's assassination lent weight to Nehru's views against Hindu nationalism, which drew its strength from the trauma produced by Partition (Jaffrelot 1993: 87). However, the Congress continued to harbour these different ideological currents. As Rajni Kothari (1964) demonstrated in his often quoted article, the 'Congress system' had internalized the process of political competition, which generally takes the form of opposition between different parties, but which, in this case, involved different groups within the Congress.

Nehru staunchly defended his secular viewpoint against the pro-Hindu faction in the Congress. The election of Purushottam Das Tandon as Congress president in 1950 marked a victory for the party's Hindu nationalist wing. However, after Patel's demise in December 1950, Tandon lost a strong ally and resigned from the president's post in 1951. Nehru was then elected

Congress president and imposed his secular views within the party (Graham 1988: 179–80). Between 1951 and 1964, the Nehru government was guided by, and followed, a secular nationalism. After Nehru's death, the Congress's discourse remained anchored in the secular tradition, even though some of its actions went against its principles.[20] It is, nevertheless, possible to claim that after independence and for almost three decades, the dominant nationalist discourse in India was secular.[21] This dominance was due not so much to the decreasing importance of religion in society or to the Hindu Right's loss of credibility on account of its association with Gandhi's assassination in 1948, but to the fact that the ruling elite looked to the West for inspiration and was influenced by the Western models (liberal or communist but, in any case, secular) of organizing the state and society (Vijayan 2004: 374). According to Juergensmeyer (1993: 12):

> secularism was more than just a political issue, it was also a matter of personal identity. A new kind of person had come into existence – the 'Indian nationalist' or 'Ceylonese nationalist' who possessed an abiding faith in a secular nationalism identified with his or her homeland.

The Congress has remained the main representative of the secular nationalist discourse at the national political level although the party has repeatedly wandered from the Nehruvian secular ideals. Since the 1980s, it indulged in 'a communalisation of the political game' in terms of rhetoric and the issues it has supported (Jaffrelot 1995a: 233; also see Mukhopadhyay 1994). As a matter of fact, after the 1980s the Congress espoused issues with a Hindu connotation. In 1982–83, the slogan *garibi hatao* (let us eradicate poverty) with which Indira Gandhi won the 1971 elections, no longer appealed to the minorities, the tribals and the rural poor who formed the Congress's traditional vote bank. The party, then dominated entirely by Mrs Gandhi, had to find a new motive to stay in power. Indira Gandhi used the growing anxiety for national unity caused by the movement supporting an independent Punjab to mobilize the urban middle class in the country's Hindi heartland (Kothari 1998: 44). Not only did she address the 'Hindu constituency' in her speeches, but she also reaffirmed her personal identity as a Hindu by visiting Hindu pilgrimage centres and adopting an internationally renowned guru as her mentor (Das 2004: 392–3, n.7). In having recourse to Hindu themes and trying to mobilize the Hindu electorate, Indira Gandhi opened the way for Hindu nationalism. After she was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984 (because she had ordered the Indian army to enter the Golden Temple in Amritsar), the Congress did not try to control the riots that broke out between Hindus and Sikhs and was at times even responsible for orchestrating them. These riots occurred in several Indian cities and were particularly brutal in Delhi. According to the *Nanavati Commission Report* (the ninth report on the anti-Sikh riots of 1984) made public in 2005, local Congress leaders as well as party members had frequently incited the crowd and even participated in the attacks against the Sikhs.

Rajiv Gandhi succeeded Indira as prime minister. He gave in to demands based on religious grounds by making concessions to the Muslim community in the 'Shah Bano case' and to Hindus by unlocking the doors of the *Babri Masjid* in Ayodhya. These decisions contributed to legitimizing the use of religious themes in the political discourse and, as a consequence, in normalizing the Hindu nationalist discourse (Jaffrelot 1995a).

Shah Bano is a Muslim woman who was repudiated by her husband according to the Muslim personal law after he contracted a second marriage in 1978. In 1980, she asked for a revision of her alimony and lodged a complaint against her husband under Article 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code that deals with the maintenance of spouse, children and parents. Her former husband filed an appeal in the Supreme Court. His grievance was based on the application to individuals of the two civil codes coexisting in India, namely the Hindu Code and the Sharia. He claimed that according to the Sharia, he was not bound by any obligation to support his former wife after the *iddat*[22] period. In April 1985, the Supreme Court decided that Article 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code also applied to Muslims. Further, the Court estimated that the payment of alimony did not contravene Koranic law. However, Islamic organizations strongly protested against this decision. In response, the Indian parliament passed in January 1986 the *Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill*. This amendment puts Muslims outside the purview of Article 125 and affirms, as a consequence, that the payment of alimony is limited to the *iddat* period.

As for the *Babri Masjid* in Ayodhya, some Hindus had claimed for a long time that it was built on the ruins of a temple dedicated to Lord Ram, situated on the exact place of the birth of the deity.[23] According to this argument, the temple had been destroyed by a general of the Mughal Emperor Babur (1483–1530) who replaced it with a mosque. In 1949, a small idol of Lord Ram 'appeared' in the mosque. This increased the tension between Hindus and Muslims regarding the ownership of the shrine. To put an end to the conflict, the Nehru government had the mosque sealed. Only the priests in charge of performing the religious rites were allowed to enter the shrine. This bone of contention gradually disappeared from the Indian political scene until the Hindu nationalists dug it up in 1984. The government succumbed to their demands in early 1986, and the seal was removed so that Hindus could worship the idol of Ram inside the mosque.[24]

Some observers believe that the Congress's credibility has been again very severely affected by the appointment of Sankarsinh Vaghela to lead the Congress campaign ahead of the Gujarat Assembly elections in December 2002 (Desai 2004: 204). Between 1985 and 1990, Vaghela was a full-time RSS worker (*pracharak*). He then became president of the BJP in Gujarat (when Narendra Modi was the party's secretary-general). In 1995, when his rival Keshubhai Patel became chief minister of Gujarat, Vaghela left the BJP to form his own party, the *Rashtriya Janata Party*. He attracted a large number of Members of the Legislative Assembly to his side and this allowed him to

become chief minister in 1996 with support from the Congress. Following poor electoral results in 1998, he joined the Congress.[25]

The recalling of these events was aimed at showing that the Congress's position since the 1980s participated in legitimizing the recourse to political demands based on religious arguments, but also that its many compromises on secularism resulted in the blurring of 'traditional' discourses. For instance, in 1999, at a Congress conclave, Sonia Gandhi declared that secular ideals could be equated with Hinduism as a philosophy and a way of life (quoted in Kang 1999 *Outlook*). This statement was no more than an echo of an argument widely used in the Hindu nationalist discourse. Moreover, notably the 'Shah Bano affair' revived the criticism that the Congress was pampering minorities. This criticism was used by and also benefited the Hindu nationalists. Nevertheless, and despite the sometimes overlapping positions of the Congress and the BJP, one difference persists: the Congress has never projected itself as a movement that claims that nationality is based on religion and excludes minorities.

The long domination of the Congress over Indian politics lasted until its defeat in 1989, although there was a brief non-Congress interlude between 1977 and 1980. Since 1989, India has been governed by coalitions. It was also since 1989 that the political influence of Hindu nationalism grew significantly until 1998 when the BJP formed the Union government at the head of a large coalition.

The Hindu nationalist discourse and the Sangh Parivar

The term communalism in the Indian context is associated either with the adjective 'Hindu' or 'Muslim'. It denotes an exclusive attachment to one's own religious community combined with suspicion, fear and hostility towards other communities that share its geographical and political space (Kakar 1996b: 13).[26] It refers to an ideology according to which the prime factor explaining individual actions is religion.[27] From a communalist viewpoint, persons belonging to the same religion share common social, political and economic interests (Chandra 1984: 1). In this view, society is divided into communities defined exclusively by their religious belonging.

In this study, I will use the term 'Hindu nationalism' because it enables the Indian case to be situated within the larger category of religious nationalisms, whereas the term 'communalism' is specific to India and tends to present it as a unique Indian phenomenon.[28] Moreover, my definition of Hindu nationalism (see below) is more specific than the general use of the term 'communalism'. However, it is important to note here that several Indian intellectuals find the use of the adjectives 'nationalist' and 'Hindu' unacceptable to describe a movement they call communalist (e.g. Sarkar 2002: 246, n.1). They underline that the concept of nationalism is connoted positively in India as it refers to the struggle for independence and evokes the idea of union around a common goal. For this reason, calling a movement nationalist could

be seen as attributing a positive quality to it. On the contrary, the term 'communalism' evokes the idea of division. First used in the 1920s, it denotes 'with strong pejorative connotations, the chauvinism of religious communities dividing the Indian nation' (Jaffrelot 1995a: 213).

Hindu nationalism can be defined as a movement and a discourse (individual or collective) according to which adherence to Hinduism is an essential condition for belonging to the Indian nation. Furthermore, the way in which religious affiliation is used in the Hindu national project (as a criterion determining national belonging) makes it the equivalent of belonging to a supposedly distinct (Indo-Aryan) 'race' (see Baber 2006: ch. 1 and van der Veer 1999). Minorities are accepted as long as they are willing to recognize Hindu symbols as national symbols and confine their faith strictly to the private domain (Jaffrelot 2004: 214). For those who support this religious definition of the Indian nation, citizenship and nationality do not coincide in India. The objective of Hindu nationalism is to transform the political space so that it corresponds to the Hindu nationalist definition of the Indian nation. This is what Brubaker calls 'nation-shaping nationalism'. Hindu nationalism is, indeed, not a movement in search of a state or a movement for a nation's political autonomy (or 'state-seeking nationalism') (on this distinction see Brubaker 2000: ch. 4). Its aim is to ensure that the state corresponds to a particular view of the nation. Hindu nationalists believe that the Indian public space and politics should become more Hindu (in accordance with their own concept of Hinduism) in order to make India a Hindu nation.

Yet, the meaning of the category 'Hindu' is not fixed and has evolved since the appearance of the term. Several scholars, including Robert E. Frykenberg (1993, 1996), Daniel Gold (1991) and Romila Thapar (1989, 2005), argue that what is today commonly known as Hinduism, which they respectively call 'new Hinduism', 'organized Hinduism(s)' and 'syndicated Hinduism', appeared only in the first half of the nineteenth century (for a divergent opinion, see Lorenzen 1999). Formerly, there were many communities separated by their distinctive religious practices. The introduction by the colonial government of a system of political representation and sharing of power by religious communities was responsible for the crystallization of the idea of a homogeneous Hindu community (Thapar 1989: 229).[29]

Hindu nationalism built itself and participated in building this homogenized Hindu identity. This discourse developed a more unifying and more encompassing version of what it means to be a Hindu. It partook in the solidification of a new overarching Hindu identity that goes beyond divisions between sects and modes of worship, regions and castes. The ideologues of Hindu nationalism contended that these divisions were dangerously weakening the Hindu nation. Christophe Jaffrelot shows how the reformist and then the Hindu nationalist movements have appropriated some characteristic traits of their Christian and Muslim adversaries to counter their perceived organizational disadvantages (1992 and 1993). The *Sangh Parivar* developed a 'semiticized' version of Hinduism with the *Gita* as sacred book and Ram as the 'universal

Hindu God' (Lochtefeld 1996). But the weakening of the Hindu nation was also seen as a consequence of keeping some sections of the population out of the Hindu fold. For this reason, the Hindu nationalist movement set itself the objective to (re)integrate within a more inclusive definition of 'Hindus' those who had been pushed to the margins.[30] Hindu nationalism advocates a view of Hinduism, which encompasses not only the Dalits, but also the tribal population, the Sikhs and Jains.[31] This encompassing conception of Hinduism allows its proponents to claim that their vision should be implemented in the name of democracy (understood as the rule of the majority) as they represent the Hindu majority.

The nineteenth-century religious reform movements already contained some elements of the Hindu nationalist discourse as propounded by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966) in his book published in 1923 and regarded as the founding text of Hindu nationalism, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Savarkar was the president of the *Hindu Mahasabha* established in 1915 to bring together local Hindu movements to protect the interests of Hindus who it believed were threatened by the policies of both the Muslim League and the Congress. In 1925, some members of this organization led by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar decided to leave it to set up the RSS.[32] The RSS, which defines itself as a sociocultural and not political organization, aims at promoting and strengthening the Hindu nation.[33] The terms in which the RSS presents its mission are revealing in this respect:

> The aim of the Sangh is to organise the entire Hindu society, and not just to have a Hindu organisation within the ambit of this society. . . . Though started as an institution, the aim of the Sangh is to expand so extensively that each and every individual and traditional social institution like family, caste, profession, educational and religious institutions etc., are all to be ultimately engulfed into its system. The goal before the Sangh is to have an organised Hindu society in which all its constituents and institutions function in harmony and co-ordination, just as in the body organs. . . .
>
> The aim is to activise the dormant Hindu society, to make it come out of its self-oblivion and realise its past mistakes, to instil in it a firm determination to set them right, and finally to make it bestir itself to reassert its honour and self-respect so that no power on earth dares challenge it in the days to come.
>
> (RSS 2005)[34]

To attain its goals, the RSS developed a hierarchical organization whose basic units are the *shakhas* (or 'branches') that bring together members of a neighbourhood. According to RSS estimates, there are *shakhas* in 50,000 villages and towns over India. However, numbers concerning membership are not available because the members are not formally registered. One is considered a member of the RSS if one participates in the *shakha* as singled out on the organization's website: 'To Join RSS is simple. You have to just attend the nearest RSS shakha' (RSS 2009). The RSS draws its mobilizing

power from these units and sees them as an instrument for bringing about social transformation:

> The Shakha, in fact, is not an end in itself, but just a means to achieve the end, which in brief is social transformation. The programmes in the Shakha are so structured that while they develop a proper insight and make one aware of the deficiencies and drawbacks in the society, it also instils a sense of pride and intense love for its glorious cultural heritage and, simultaneously, awakens his commitment to work for its emancipation. Thus, through the instrumentality of the Shakha, men are moulded, and they in turn enter varied social fields to ennoble them with Hindu fervour.
> (RSS 2005)

The participants, only men, gather usually in the morning or in the evening for an hour. At the beginning of each assembly, the saffron flag is raised and RSS members called *swayamsevaks* recite the RSS prayer. Then they do physical exercises and discuss issues relating to the promotion of the Hindu nation. The meetings follow the same pattern every day.

Between 1948 and 1949, the Congress Party imposed a ban on the activities of the RSS, accusing it of being partly responsible for Gandhi's death.[35] This decision convinced its leaders of the importance of having a political representation. In 1951, the *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (Association of Indian People – BJS) was established under the patronage of the RSS.[36] This marked the beginning of the development of the *Sangh Parivar*: the RSS set up over the years a number of organizations that constitute the Hindu nationalist movement. Taken together, these organizations are known as the *Sangh Parivar* or the RSS 'family'. This term refers to the RSS and some 30 satellite organizations associated more or less closely with the mother organization and constituting the Hindu nationalist constellation. The *Sangh Parivar* comprises notably a women's wing, the *Rashtriya Sevika Samiti* (Patriotic Association of Women Volunteers), a self-help organization, *Sewa Bharati* (Service of India), several sectoral organizations including a students' association and a labour union, a political party (the BJP), a (politico-)religious association, the *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP – Universal Hindu Association) and its youth wing, the *Bajrang Dal* (Hanuman's Army). These organizations have different modes of functioning; each has its own 'public' or audience, and each has developed a specific area of activities and has a recognizable discourse.[37]

The VHP was established in 1964 to bring together a large number of religious and political leaders in order to 'defend, protect and preserve "the Hindu society from the insidiously spreading clutches of the alien ideologies" ' (Katju 2003: 6, cites VHP 1979: vii). These ideologies were declared to be Islam, Christianity and Communism. To achieve its aim, the VHP considered it necessary to unify and strengthen Hinduism.[38] To overcome the fragmentation caused by different Hindu sects, it proposed a certain number of common rituals and festivals as well as a 'minimum code of conduct to live as a Hindu'

(Jaffrelot 1995b: 191). Moreover, this organization supports an inclusive view of Hinduism as it believes that excluding Dalits and tribals has no religious justification but only divides and weakens the Hindu nation. During the first 15 years, the VHP's activities were defensive, conceived as backing the RSS. In the 1980s, the VHP became more directly offensive. It organized important political campaigns, notably the campaign to build a Ram temple to replace the *Babri Masjid* in Ayodhya (*Ram janmabhoomi* campaign), which was extremely beneficial to the BJP in electoral terms.

The BJP, heir of the BJS, was founded in 1980 after the dislocation of the Janata Party. The latter brought together all the non-communist parties (including the BJS) opposed to Indira Gandhi's politics after she declared a state of emergency in 1975, which allowed her as prime minister to rule alone, i.e. without consulting parliament. The Janata Party won the elections in 1977 and formed a government. However, dissensions between its various constituents led to its dissolution in 1979 after only 30 months in power. In 1980, the BJS was reorganized and this reorganization led to the birth of the BJP.

The BJP made rapid electoral advances starting in the late 1980s. In 1984, the party won 2 out of the 542 seats in the *Lok Sabha*, the lower house of the Indian Parliament. In 1989, it won 86 out of 543 seats, then 120 in 1991, 161 in 1996, 182 in 1998 and 1999. In 1991, it became the second largest party in terms of seats in the *Lok Sabha* and the largest party in 1996, but without having a sufficient majority to form a government on its own. It built a coalition, which remained in power for only 13 days. The elections in 1998 brought the BJP to power at the head of the National Democratic Alliance. However, one of its allies quit the coalition and new elections had to be organized in 1999. The NDA received a majority of votes and was able to remain an entire term in office. The 2004 elections resulted in its unexpected defeat, making way for a Congress-led coalition.

Researchers who studied the amazing rise of the BJP drew attention to several factors that contributed to its growth during the last decade of the twentieth century. A set of factors refers to internal qualities of the party's discourse whereas other elements relate to the political moment. Regarding the discourse of the BJP, analysts frequently present this party as manipulating Hinduism and its symbols to mobilize the Hindu majority.[39] Linked with the religious character of the discourse, some scholars argue that the 'return to traditions' advocated by the BJP offered a reassurance to the uncertainties and anxieties caused by modernization and changes in the traditional social structure (Kakar 1996a; Kolodner 1995). At the beginning, the BJP appealed mainly to the Hindi belt,[40] urban, upper-caste audience. However, the party tried and adapted its discourse to the regional and local context. It took up issues that were crucial for voters at the local level and succeeded in attracting a spectrum of voters wider than the direct supporters of Hindu nationalism (Basu 1996; Gillan 2003; Hansen 1996; on the limits of this strategy, see Chiriyankandath 1996).

The Congress Party's decline is often presented as having allowed the BJP to win over a considerable portion of its electorate (Corbridge and Harriss 2000: ch. 6; Kolodner 1995; Ludden 1996: 17–19).[41] Another element referred to as having played a role in favour of the BJP is the telecast from January 1987 on the national television channel of the popular serial based on the epic *Ramayana*. This serial made Lord Ram an extremely popular figure among the masses. The BJP took advantage of this popularity by launching the campaign 'for the liberation of Ram's birthplace' in Ayodhya (Brosius 2005; Farmer 1996; Rajagopal 2001; Udayakumar 2005: 64–70). This movement resulted in a mobilization of upper-caste people in the 'Hindi belt' in favour of Hindu nationalism. The mobilization increased during the late 1980s and early 1990s following the discontent created by the decision of Prime Minister V.P. Singh to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission (i.e. to increase the number of jobs reserved in government service for 'Other Backward Classes' – OBC). Generally speaking, the BJP exploited the feeling of being threatened prevalent among the upper castes and the middle Class following the growing political influence of Dalits and OBC (Biswas 2004). Moreover, the BJP also showed an ability to adapt (more quickly than the Congress) to the changing political circumstances by moving from single-party domination to mechanisms involving negotiation and sharing of power in the form of coalitions incorporating regional parties. Somewhat paradoxically, the BJP's alliance with parties drawing their strength from the lower castes enabled it to benefit indirectly from the 'democratization of Indian democracy' (Desai 2004; Hansen 1999: 58; Hansen and Jaffrelot 2001).

These factors explain not only the BJP's rise to power but also the development of the Hindu nationalist movement as a whole. According to Christophe Jaffrelot (1996), the growth of Hindu nationalism can be explained by the synergy of three strategies. The first strategy of 'stigmatisation and emulation' refers to the process by which Hindu nationalism, while constructing its identity mainly against the Muslim and Christian 'Others', has assimilated some of these Others' traits, the absence of which was considered a disadvantage. The second strategy is instrumentalist and rests on the manipulation of Hindu symbols for political gains. The third strategy rests on the local presence of the RSS network.[42] Jaffrelot demonstrates through his analysis of the period extending from 1920 to 1990 that 'it was only during the 1980s that the original threefold scheme could take root and finally bear fruit' (1993: 24).

It is necessary to insist here on the fact that Hindu nationalism is not limited to the *Sangh Parivar*. Organizations such as the RSS and the VHP are extremist expressions of a much deeper influence of Hindu nationalist elements in Indian society; this discourse exists in a latent and more or less refined form in a wide spectrum of Indian society (see Mathur 2008: esp. ch. 1). Moreover, this ideology is also present in organizations such as the *Ramakrishna Mission* and it has been taken up by the Congress, or at least by a section of the party,

in certain situations or on certain specific occasions as we have already seen. However, the *Sangh Parivar* boasts that it is the principal champion of this ideology that it calls ‘cultural nationalism’.

Two recent ethnologies of Hindu nationalism (Mathur 2008 on Rajasthan and Chatterji 2009 on Orissa) explored the all-pervasive nature of the work of the *Sangh Parivar*. These researchers showed that it is far more active and influential than reflected in the vote share of the BJP: the electoral ‘side’ or the directly political work of the *Sangh Parivar* is only a small part of its activity. For this reason, it is crucial not to measure, equate or limit the strength of Hindu nationalism with the political success of the BJP. Mathur points out that ‘[c]hanging electoral fortunes do not spell the end of the cultural power of Hindu nationalism’ (2008: 12). Thus Mathur and Chatterji (and before them Hansen 1999) demonstrated how *hindutva* has penetrated everyday life and has acquired a certain degree of normality and acceptability.

One more precision is important here: calling a movement Hindu nationalist does not imply that its members are religious fanatics. Religion is seen as (but not reduced to) a way to mobilize people for awakening the nation. In connection to the ambiguous relation between Hindu nationalism and religion, Mathur (2008: 110) relates an anecdote that happened while she was in the VHP office during the year 1991. One day, a visitor arrived in the office and waited half a day until someone could speak with him. Once he had left, the VHP workers were roaring with laughter because of the man’s preoccupations: ‘he wanted to safeguard Hindu society and in particular three symbols that were in danger – the cow, the sacred thread worn by upper castes, and the pigtail supposed to be worn by learned Brahmins’. The VHP workers told Mathur that she should have interviewed him since she was interested in religion: ‘There’s a fanatic for you’.

The pasts of the Indian nation: communalist and secular historiographies

The secular and Hindu nationalist discourses are built upon two opposed narratives of history that I will present in the next section. We will see that the secular historiography was partially elaborated as an answer – or in contradiction – to the communal view of history. However, in order not to give a too simplified impression of a perfect binary opposition, I need to anticipate here and mention what will be developed later: the two discourses have some elements in common; they are ‘adjacent plants growing on the same soil’ (Ahmad 1999).

There is a very close link between history (as seen by the supporters of communalist history) and communalist ideology. History is simultaneously an instrument for propagating this ideology, one of its essential components and a result of this ideology. Bipan Chandra (1984: 209–10) notes that ‘the basic conceptions of Hindu communalism, of Hindus constituting a distinct nation

and possessing a common culture, depended on their particular interpretation of history'. According to the communalist interpretation of Indian history, the past should be seen as a struggle between different religious communities. British historians were the first to use an essentially religious interpretative model, a 'classic' example being the division of Indian history into Hindu and Muslim periods proposed by James Mill (on periodization, see Chapter 2). Historians supporting the Hindu communalist view of history continue to use this division to distinguish the original inhabitants of India from those who settled in the country later.

The first ideologues of the Hindu nationalist movement, V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar, shared and propagated this communalist view of history. The renowned historian, R.C. Majumdar, also adopted a communalist interpretation of Indian history in his *History and Culture of the Indian People* in 11 volumes edited between 1951 and 1969. According to this author, in AD1200 began a period of foreign (Muslim) domination that lasted until British colonization. During this period, he says, the Muslim rulers oppressed and humiliated the Hindu population. From this perspective, British rule was more civilized than Muslim rule. In Hindu communal representations, the medieval period was a dark time for India: Muslims invaded the country and established a tyrannical rule; they destroyed Hindu temples and forcibly imposed their religion. In contrast, ancient India was a glorious time, a golden age in which Hindu philosophy and religion flourished, science and mathematics developed and the sacred texts were written.[43]

A secular historiography developed as a reponse to the Hindu nationalist historiography. The former took up and contradicted point by point the main assumptions of the latter. Against the conception of conflictual separate and homogeneous communities, it emphasized the 'porosity and open-endedness' of the boundaries between communities, their fragmentation and heterogeneity. It underlined 'elements of concord, harmony and togetherness' (Bhattacharya 2008: 58–9). This secularist conception of history was advocated by Marxist scholars, but far from being limited to this historiographical current, it was (and still is) also found in the works of Left-oriented historians who started writing after India's independence (see Chapter 4).

These divergent representations of history are reflections, or corollaries, of the secular and Hindu nationalist conceptions of the Indian nation. The two historiographies (as the corresponding vision of the Indian nation) profoundly disagree on the importance to give to religion. As religion does not play a decisive role in the secularists' understanding of the nation, religion is not seen as a guiding factor in Indian history. For the Hindu nationalists, on the other hand, religion is an essential component of the nation imagined as a Hindu nation constantly struggling for survival against 'outsiders', mainly Muslims. As a consequence, Hindu nationalist historiography presents the division between Hindus and Muslims as the focal point of Indian history. According to this approach, these two communities have been in opposition during the

nine centuries of Indo-Muslim history, from Al-Beruni in the eleventh century to Jinnah and the creation of Pakistan.[44]

In contrast, secular historians claim that communalism and conflicts between Hindus and Muslims appeared only in the nineteenth century and are essentially a product of colonialism.[45] According to this view, the English followed the principle of 'divide and rule' and deliberately strengthened 'Muslim communalists' to counter the growing strength of Indian nationalism. The secularists further claim that the classification of the population into the categories 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' dates back only to the end of the nineteenth century and that these separate identities did not exist earlier. Neither Hindus nor Muslims formed a homogeneous community: Hindus were divided into different sects and Muslims were affiliated to different Sufi saints, places of worship, or they belonged to a particular group or lineage (Metcalf 1995: 958). For the secularists, the relationship between Hindus and Muslims was symbiotic before India's colonization and even at the beginning of the colonial period. According to this interpretation, there developed a popular syncretic religion combining Muslim practices and Hindu rituals with believers worshipping both Muslim and Hindu saints (Kakar 1996b: 13). From this point of view, whenever violence broke out, it was usually not for religious reasons but mainly economic or sociopolitical ones.

The secularists' refusal to grant religion influence on individuals' actions and thus explanatory power on historical events is to be understood first in its opposition to communalism: '[t]o critique the communalist valorization of the religious, secular historians have tried to see in every action only the play of nonreligious interests – either political or economic' (Bhattacharya 2008: 65). Then, after decolonization and Partition, the Left saw religion as a dividing factor and as a hindrance to rationality that had to be removed and replaced by civic loyalties. This interpretation reflects the general position of Left-wing historians who do not consider religion as a force by itself.[46] Here, also, the Marxist influence on the Indian elites of the 1950s comes into play. The Marxist approach and its economic determinism grant no agency and analytical space for religion to play a role in politics. Religious identities are of secondary importance as they are determined by socioeconomic conditions; religion is no more than a 'false consciousness'. According to Bipan Chandra (1984: 167), for example, politicians who claim to represent the interests of a particular religious community use religion only to promote Class interests (for critique of Chandra's approach, see Lorenzen 1995: 6–9).[47]

Kakar summarizes the difference between these two representations of Indian history as follows:

> [T]he story of Hindu-Muslim relations takes on different hues depending upon the color of the ideological lenses through which it is viewed. For the liberal historian or one with leftist leanings, the story is bathed in a roseate glow of precolonial golden age of Hindu-Muslim amity. . . .

> To the conservative Hindu nationalist, on the other hand, for whom the Hindu saffron and the Muslim green do not mix to create a pale pink, the rift between the two communities is a fundamental fact of Indian history.
> (Kakar 1996b: 15)

However, these two conceptions seem too polarized. The secularists, in what can be called an irenic historiography, prefer to ignore or not admit that the conflicts that occurred before colonization could have had religious causes.[48] As for Hindu nationalists, they overestimate the strength of Hindu and Muslim identities in the precolonial period as well as the opposition resulting from this identification (Kakar 1996b: 21).

2 Textbooks, teachers and students

School and nation-building

The studies on nations and nationalism postulate a link between education and nationalism and the manner in which this link is presented is often similar: these works underline the homogenizing and hence nationalizing effect of the education system and educational content. They also point out the central role played in this process by the 'common past' transmitted by the school. However, these studies generally give few details on how things work; the line of argument linking the school, the 'common past' and the nation is, most of the time, sketchy and secondary. It can be summarized as follows: the 'common past' is essential for nation-building. The state, being in a position of power, prescribes a 'common past' and imposes it in different spheres and by different means, particularly through the educational system.[1]

However, a more detailed analysis reveals that the neat process described in the preceding paragraph might be, in fact, much more complex, less coherent and not linear. It poses questions about the origin, form, authorship and existence of this supposed 'common past': Where does this 'common past' come from? Who writes it? Who decides its form? Who selects its components? And, more fundamentally, is there a shared 'common past'?

The school as an educational institution is deemed to be, just like the family, one of the principal agents of socialization and a place for the transmission and building of personal and social identities (Reboul 2004: 31–7). Research in the sociology of education showed that the values and worldview transmitted through this institution influence the formation of a child's intellect in a lasting manner.[2] The school, by performing this function of transmission, is seen as playing a significant role in the building and diffusion of national identities.

As far as the genesis of nationalism is concerned, several studies underlined the role played by the establishment of centralized administrative systems (Mann 1994: ch. 7; Tilly 1975: ch. 1); other pieces of research pointed out the importance of universal conscription (Howard 1976: ch. 6; Mann 1994: ch. 7; Weber 1983: ch. 17); and many studies emphasized that the introduction of a common education system all over the state participated in the development of national identities. The school is presented as the preferred vehicle for

national identities because the education system covers the state territory and enables the diffusion of the chosen educational content. According to this type of reasoning, schools act to homogenize the population (Gellner 1983); to socialize the nation's members (Hobsbawm 1995; Smith 1991: 16); to promote the institutionalization of some categories, notably national categories of 'We' and 'Others'; and to participate in the inculcation of the 'common' past and 'common' myths, which are seen as key elements in the building of the national identity (Armstrong 1982: 8–9; Smith 1987: 2).

An often-quoted example of the school's nationalizing role is France where school teachers have been sent to villages since the late eighteenth century to impose the supremacy of the French language over regional dialects (Hermet 1996: 108–13; Weber 1983: ch. 18). Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* is another illustration of the use of the public education system, in this case to transmit values based on Protestantism in the entire country (Hermet 1996: 172). However, in Germany as well as in France, the homogenizing project was never total; it accepted and even included regional differences (see Thiesse 1997).

I would not deny that the school participates in the process of nation-building, but I believe that some prudence is necessary when determining the impact exerted by the messages it circulates. The school's influence has limitations as the cases of the former Soviet Union and East Timor have shown. Thus, the political regime in the former Soviet Union was challenged from within even as schools dispensed an education based entirely on communist ideals.

> For several decades, it was taught with the help of history that, broadly speaking, capitalism was hell while socialism opened the doors to paradise. What did the members of the various republics do when they got the opportunity to choose? They chose hell.
>
> (Laville 2000: 163)

In East Timor, the education system was designed so as to instil Indonesian values and practices in children, but all efforts to impose an Indonesian identity failed despite the numerous strategies employed by the Indonesian government since the mid-1970s (Arena 1998). Yet, even though there is no guarantee that the messages will be absorbed by the students, the potential strength of the school system is clear to the actors who are in a position to condition its content. Since the school is supposed to influence young minds, states model it in such a way that it transmits the 'right' information. The school was, and still is, considered as a training-ground for responsible citizens.

In India, the postcolonial elites envisioned a centralized system in which a small group of people working in different fields would urge the state towards modernization. The establishment of the NCERT in 1961 resulted from this desire for centralized development.[3] This institution was envisaged as an instrument in the service of the state and entrusted with the tasks of modernization and nation-building. Textbooks 'framed within a rational and modernist

imagination' were the tentacles of the developmental and modernizing state (Sreenivas *et al.* s.d.).

The nation-building role attributed to school is a striking and enduring feature of Indian education policies. In 1952, the Mudaliar Commission Report defined the goals of secondary education in the following words: 'The aim of secondary education is to train the youth of the country to be good citizens who will be competent to play their part effectively in the social reconstruction and economic development of their country' (quoted in Advani 1996: 2077). In the same spirit, the 1986 national education policy emphasized the function of national integration that the school was expected to perform. The curriculum for primary and secondary education resulting from this policy remained faithful to this concern. In its first part, it states that

> [a]t this point of our history, the most urgent need is to consciously develop national spirit and national identity. Education, as an instrument of social transformation, should ensure that its beneficiaries and products demonstrate a national consciousness, a national spirit and national identity which are considered essential for national unity.
>
> (NCERT 1988: 5)

The same desire for nation-building is found in the curriculum prepared in 2000. The following extract figures in the opening chapter:

> The school curriculum must inculcate and nurture a sense of pride in being an Indian through a conscious understanding of the growth of Indian civilisation and also contributions of India to the world civilisation and vice versa in thoughts and deeds. Strengthening of national identity and unity is intimately associated with the study of the cultural heritage of India, rich with various hues. . . . [Education] should be seen as developing a national spirit and national unity essential for national identity.
>
> (NCERT 2000: 12)

As illustrated by this brief overview, the official documents of the last 60 years demonstrated an identical zeal for nation-building. However, even though the *role* assigned to the school has remained the same despite the divergent ideological approaches of successive governments, the way the nation is *represented* (among other things in the version of history taught in school) has changed. Consequently, the *content* to be transmitted has had to be adjusted. As a matter of fact, the politically dominant group plays a major role in defining the national project taught in school, because it decides who will be appointed to important posts in institutions in charge of education that lay down the education policy, prepare the curriculum and the textbooks and are responsible for training teachers. So, when the dominant group loses its position, the national project is likely to change.

In view of the power attributed to the school and what it teaches, the selection of the curriculum's (and the textbooks') content often gives rise to controversies about what it represents and the values it promotes.[4] While preparing this document, a few areas of knowledge are selected from a much more extensive field. This selection is of course not neutral. It is done by some social groups, in certain institutions, and at a given time (Apple 1979: 45; see also Bourdieu and Passeron 1970). The curriculum, then, represents the elements of knowledge perceived as being worthy of transmission to the next generation. Because of this, it embodies the image of how the future should be. And for this very reason it amounts to exercising a political choice.

In general, history (as well as geography and civics) textbooks enjoy a special status among textbooks as far as national identity is concerned. These textbooks contain the nation's official history (official in the sense that it is endorsed by the state). They usually narrate the nation's development as the result of a long evolution from ancient times to the present. In this perspective, the mission of the teaching of history is to convey to the new generation the official version of the national past.

Nevertheless, difficulties arise when the chosen version of the past is questioned or when there is no longer a consensus on what is the 'common past'. Such cases bring to the fore the limits of the state's homogenizing possibilities. This limitation results from the change in the ideology professed by successive governments. Although studies on nationalism underline the central role of the 'common past' in the process of nation-building, they rarely take into account the fact that the representation of this 'common past' can be bitterly disputed. They stress the importance of school education and, particularly, the importance of the teaching of history for nation-building; they sometimes acknowledge the existence of competing national histories, but they do not look at the implications of this diversity for nation-building. Indeed, there is no nation without history, but which history?

As we will see in India's case, the teaching of history in schools was based on the official version of the 'common past', which was subjected to rapid changes between 1998 and 2005. During this period, official history was modified three times. The debates accompanying these changes showed that, all said and done, the 'common past' was far from being unanimously shared.

Teaching and learning in Indian schools

Textbook culture

Owing to the way teaching and learning are conceived in Indian schools, textbooks play a key role. The preparation of a textbook is the end-result of a process consisting of several stages: first, the curriculum is planned, then the syllabus is worked out and, finally, textbooks are written. In practice, once the exercise is completed, the first two stages 'disappear' and the only reference that remains is the textbook. Teachers rarely consult either the curriculum

or the syllabus when preparing their lessons.[5] They follow the textbook, which is often the only source on which the lessons are based.

Krishna Kumar describes education in India as a 'textbook culture' (Kumar 2005: 67).[6] This expression denotes first and foremost a system in which teaching is based on state-prescribed textbooks; second, and as a result of the first point, a system in which teachers do not have the freedom to choose what they want to teach; third, a system in which no other resources apart from the textbook are available in most schools; finally, a system in which evaluations, especially examinations, are based only on the matters reproduced in the textbooks (Kumar 1988: 453).[7]

The examinations held at the end of classes X and XII (Board Exams) are centralized. They give rise to a great deal of anxiety among students and parents and every year students commit suicide during the examination period. The results of these examinations are important because admission to certain institutes and universities depends on them. Exams are based entirely on the contents of the school books and, even if they contain a mistake, the correct answer is always the one given in the book. This examination system adds to the status of the textbook as a source of indisputable and intangible knowledge. Further, the type of examination that children have to sit determines what can be taught. In the present system, the material has to be tested either in the form of multiple-choice questions or brief essays. In 1993, a report prepared under the chairmanship of Professor Yash Pal drew attention to the fact that the education system was suffering from confusion between *understanding* a subject and *memorizing* facts and that this confusion led to the neglect of understanding as the purpose of education (GoI 1993; on the role of memorization see Sarangapani 2003: ch. 7).

This conception of learning in the Indian education system is heir to the conception that prevailed in the traditional system in which the *guru* was considered as an infallible authority and the student was expected to be totally submissive to him (K. Kumar 2005: 93). Poromesh Acharya, who studied the indigenous education system in Bengal from ancient times until the introduction of the colonial system, describes in the following words the relationship between the teacher and the student in the *tols* and *pathsalas* (schools of higher classical education):

> The teacher-student relationship was one of absolute authority and perfect loyalty. The teacher like a father would look after the spiritual welfare of his pupils, and like a son the pupil would perform the religious and worldly duties of the household. . . . A pupil should serve the teacher in word, mind and deed, and obey him in all respects as without obedience the learning would be fruitless.
>
> (Acharya 1996: 104)

Colonial education was in line with the idea of the all-powerful teacher because he only possessed 'modern knowledge' (K. Kumar 2005: 93).

Colonial education policies also contributed to the acceptance of the textbook as the repository of non-negotiable knowledge. Its contents reflected the official perspective that students were expected to assimilate and a centralized examination ensured that it had been absorbed (K. Kumar 2001: 63).

In the present education system the teacher often plays the role of an intermediary between the textbook and the student. According to Krishna Kumar:

> in India the teacher's appropriate job continues to be regarded as that of delivering the prescribed content of textbooks. The student's duty is to ingest this prescribed content. There is no room in this process for genuine inquiry, for it is assumed that all necessary inquiry has already been made; and that the result of the inquiry has been packaged in the syllabus and the textbooks.
>
> (Kumar 2005: 94)

Each student has to buy his/her own textbooks for each subject and bring to school the textbooks that will be needed during the day. The picture of young children carrying on their back huge school bags weighted down by the numerous textbooks has become the classic image of schoolchildren and the symbol of the quantity of information they are expected to imbibe. During the lessons, the students keep their textbooks open on their desks. The teacher reads or asks the children to read each part of the textbook. The students also repeat all together some paragraphs or the answers to questions given at the end of each chapter. The teacher paraphrases and explains what has been read so that the students become familiar with the material that they will later have to memorize for the examinations.[8]

The textbook's power is, however, counterbalanced by a utilitarian and negative perception of these books. The students and their parents perceive the learning of the content of these textbooks as a necessity, an exercise that involves remembering a large quantity of information until the examination. Under these circumstances, learning is not something valuable per se but it draws its value from its eventual reproduction at the time of examination. Narayani Gupta, professor in the Department of History and Culture of the *Jamia Millia Islamia*, was involved in the preparation of textbooks for the Union Territory of Delhi in 2004. According to her, 'the textbooks are boring, too difficult to follow. The problem with the quality of the textbooks is that no one cares. People say "the children will be through it in nine months anyway".'[9]

The impact of what is in the textbooks heavily depends on the teacher's way of presenting it but the teacher's influence is somehow diminished by the 'textbook culture'.

> Since the very notion of teaching in our education system is generally reduced to 'giving information', the teacher is conditioned and often

> constrained to perform accordingly. . . . In this scenario the textbook becomes the Bible. . . . [T]he child stops trying to make sense of what is being 'taught', and falls in line with what is expected – to unthinkingly repeat what has been told. At the time of examinations, she/he is hailed as a 'good student' only if she/he manages to faithfully reproduce these *mantras*, when asked.
>
> (Rampal 2002: 155)

The 'omnipotence' of the textbook gives rise to the belief that whatever it contains can never be questioned. The only knowledge considered valid is that reproduced in textbooks; all other sources of knowledge and learning are of secondary importance. The school transmits knowledge and the rest is entertainment or just anecdotes.

> For instance, a child is trained to believe that history is what is written in history textbooks; there is no history in his grandmother's experiences. Or literature means only those selected pieces of poetry and prose, not his grandmother's folk songs or folk tales!
>
> (Pathak 2002: 153)

Thus, the textbook's monopoly on knowledge gives its contents an unparalleled strength.

Besides, the disciplines taught in school and the knowledge contained in the textbooks are assigned different values. At present, and not only in India, anything related to technology and the 'hard' sciences is considered to be of prime importance and of the utmost use because of its 'added value' while social and human sciences are seen as secondary and unusable. This differentiation in value is reflected in education and especially in the way various subjects are viewed by parents and children. This is also reflected in the current trend where children with an aptitude for mathematics are 'intelligent' while those inclined towards literature and the arts are categorized less favourably (Pathak 2002: 159). Avijit Pathak proposes an additional factor to explain the importance given to the 'hard' sciences and the devaluation of human and social sciences. According to him, 'there is a deeper meaning of this hierarchy of knowledge. Literature and humanities as "soft" disciplines are often regarded as "feminine" – good for girls, but not for boys who must study "masculine"/ "hard" science and build up their careers' (Pathak 2002: 164).

Chitra Srinivas, who taught history in Sardar Patel Vidyalaya in Delhi, believed that students treat history as the most boring subject and few of them would like to take it up at university level (Srinivas 2002). The didactic of history in textbooks certainly participates in the Indian students' disinterest in the subject. These books expose India's history in a linear and uniform manner (Kumar 1996: 13). The same importance is given to every period, which means that almost the same number of pages is devoted to each.[10] The curriculum insists on the acquisition of information about certain events, but without

pointing out the links between them or their interdependence. So what students get is only a fragmented idea of a past consisting of disjointed pictures that Kumar calls ‘memory posters’. This metaphor aptly illustrates the idea of scenes from the past floating in time (Kumar 2001: 81). When presented this way, history ceases to be a ‘living’ subject, but is reduced to a long list of names and dates to be memorized.

A large number of people working in the fields of education and training of teachers have, for a long time, pointed out these problems and have tried to find ways to ‘free’ teachers from the shackles of the textbook. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) started in 1994 to promote the spread of elementary education. It concentrated on specific schemes to suit the requirements of each district, it developed educational tools adapted to the needs of students and offered better training for teachers. Anita Rampal (2001) evaluated the implementation of this programme in some districts of Kerala. She points out that children appreciate the experimental teaching methods used in this programme. However, ‘[p]arents are wary of the new approach, which they and the media construe to be mere “song and dance”. They have long been conditioned to expect “serious studies” to be routine pen and paper drills performed in “pin drop silence”’ (Rampal 2001: 1). Rampal shows that this approach successfully instilled a new dynamism into teaching:

> Normally teachers across the country are conditioned to maintain a stern presence, often with the help of a cane to highlight their role as law-keepers. Children are generally made to sit in passive posture and dutifully follow the dictates of the teacher. However, in a pleasant departure from this norm, children in most of the classes we visited seemed free with their teachers, and responded to them without much fear.
>
> (Rampal 2001: 2)

The Indian education system: different types of schools, different textbooks

Since 1976, education is a concurrent subject under the purview of both the central and state governments. The Centre elaborates the education policy and determines the curriculum, which serves as a guideline for the states. It also coordinates various educational schemes and determines the standards applicable in the country as a whole, but the states are free to evolve their own policies within the framework fixed by the Centre.

The Indian education system is built on the model commonly known as the 10 + 2 + 3 model. The first 10 years are split into elementary and secondary levels, the two following years constitute the higher secondary, and the last three years are spent at university. Although this structure has been adopted by all the states and Union Territories, it does not preclude differences between states regarding, in particular, the age of admission in primary school (usually when children are five or six years old) and the number of years constituting

the different levels. Generally speaking, the elementary level (consisting of the primary and upper primary) covers classes I to VIII, and the secondary level classes IX to XII (which is split into the secondary level consisting of classes IX and X and the higher secondary level consisting of classes XI and XII).

Education is imparted through government schools as well as private institutions. Government schools are managed by some level of government, central (federal), regional (state) or local. The vast majority of the schools in each state are under the control of the State Education Board. These schools are free but they suffer from numerous problems such as teachers' absenteeism and lack of infrastructure.[11] Parents who can afford it (already with very low revenues) prefer to send their children to private schools in the hope that the quality of teaching will be better (and it seems to be the case even in unrecognized schools, see Tooley 2005).

For a long time, private schools were costly and considered the preserve of the elite. This has changed with the increasing number of private schools since the early 1990s. What is often described as the 'mushrooming' of private schools happened in urban as well as in rural areas and the monthly fees charged vary greatly depending on the location and clientele of the school.[12] The available private education includes at one end, the 'teaching shops', or unrecognized schools where teaching is sometimes done in just one room and at the other end, the reputed 'public schools', such as the Doon School, which have traditionally educated the future elite (regarding Doon School, see Srivastava 1998). However, the most significant change is the development of a vast low-cost education sector, which means that many poor children now attend private schools.[13]

Unrecognized private schools depend only on fee-revenues. The recognized schools (meaning that they have been inspected and declared as complying with government regulations) are either entirely privately funded (these are private unaided schools) or they receive funds from the government covering teachers' salaries and other expenses (private aided schools). Private aided schools are in many regards similar to government schools. They should charge no fees and teachers receive the salary fixed by the regional state whereas teachers generally earn less in private unaided schools. However, in aided and unaided private schools, teachers' absenteeism is lower than in government schools. Moreover, private schools are often 'English medium' whereas government schools teach in the regional language. Generally speaking, parents prefer education in English as it promises better professional opportunities for their children (see Ramalingam 2009 India Together).[14]

During the school year 2006–7, 228 million students were enrolled in government, private aided and unaided schools. There were approximately 134 million students at the primary level (classes I–V), 54 million at the upper primary level (classes VI–VIII) and 40 million at the secondary and higher secondary levels (classes IX–XII). Private unaided schools represented approximately 7 per cent of the total number of primary schools, 22 per cent of intermediate level schools, 33 per cent of secondary schools and 36 per cent

of higher secondary schools (GoI 2009). If the unrecognized schools, which do not enter in the statistics of the government, are included, the percentages of private unaided schools would be higher for all levels and especially at the primary level where it could triple (Kingdon 2007). Despite these millions of children in schools, an estimated 21 million children of primary school age were still out of school in 2006. This is however much less than the 30 million in 2000 (Huebler 2007).[15] During the last 20 years, the situation of education has improved. As we have seen, the number of children out of school decreased, the literacy rate increased, and the difference between boys and girls was also reduced. However, the drop out rate remains high. Of the children in Class I, 60 per cent will leave school before Class X (26 per cent before Class V and 46 per cent before Class VIII) (GoI 2009).

The growing number of private schools is partly due to the fall in public funds allotted to education and, simultaneously, the rise in the demand for education from parents. Many state governments encourage the setting up of private schools to overcome – with no cost for the government – the shortage of government-aided schools (Chatterji 2009: 177; De *et al.* 2002). However, the increase in the number of private unaided schools, which partly makes up for the lack of sufficient seats in government schools, does not guarantee an equitable access to education. The country's poorest regions suffer from a significant disadvantage in terms of availability of education as private schools 'rely on fees and other levies (e.g. "donations" to obtain admission). Since parents are responsible for funding children's schooling, founders are mindful of locating their school where it can expect to remain afloat financially' (Jeffery *et al.* 2004: 35).

For Muslim families, *Madrasas* being free private schools (generally funded by contributions) partially fulfil the unsatisfied demands of parents as far as education is concerned. *Madrasas* can be divided into three groups according to their links with the state in which they are located: there are *madrasas* set up by states and run by 'State Madrasa Boards', there are private *madrasas* affiliated to the State Board and private *madrasas* supported by private bodies and not affiliated to any State Board (GoI 2005: 65–9). Some *madrasas* belonging to the last category provide only religious instruction (*manqulat*). However, several studies on teaching in Indian *madrasas* refute the idea often circulated after the attacks of 11 September 2001 that these institutions serve as training camps to promote Islamic fundamentalism. These studies show that even though the *madrasas* provide religious instruction, they do not encourage intolerance (GoI 2005: 65–9; Hartung and Reifeld 2006; Jeffery *et al.* 2004: 38–9; Kumar 2003; Sikand 2005). Moreover, in many cases the parents' decision to send their children to a *madrasa* for their schooling is prompted by the absence of other alternatives rather than a preference for religious education (Jeffery *et al.* 2004: 36–7).

Denominational schools play a significant role in education. Apart from the Islamic organizations running private *madrasas*, the main actors in this field are Catholic and Protestant Churches and the *Sangh Parivar*.[16]

There are a large number of schools run by Protestant and Catholic bodies all over India. Christian education began in India with colonization and missionary schools, first Catholic after the arrival of the Portuguese in Calicut in 1498 and then Protestant, but not only Anglican as once the East India Company opened the territory for evangelization missionaries came from different countries (Clémentin-Ojha 1998: 9). Christian institutions of education were of different types, which are still to be found today (Heredia 1995: 2333–4). There are elementary schools attached to churches and mission stations (for an historical example, see Shetty 2008); orphanages and other institutions where children receive a basic education; seminaries for theological instruction; and institutions of higher education. These institutions were set up in the nineteenth century and some still enjoy a very good reputation. Both Protestant and Catholic missionaries have been active in tribal areas where they have opened schools. These activities have been strongly criticized by Hindu nationalists as primarily aimed at converting tribals. In response, different *Sangh Parivar* organizations set up schools in these regions to impart rudimentary literacy to Adivasis.

In 'disadvantaged areas' (tribal areas and slums mostly), the *Sangh Parivar* has launched educational schemes outside the formal school system. This is seen as social work or *sewa*, which is a central component of Hindu nationalist activities.[17] In tribal areas, the RSS (through *Vidya Bharati*, see below) runs *Ekal Vidyalayas*, which are schools set up in villages to impart rudimentary literacy to Adivasis (regarding the *Ekal Vidyalayas*, see Chapter 4). It developed *Sanskar Kendras* (civilization centres) in geographically remote or socially disadvantaged areas. The latter are part-time schools where classes are held for a few hours every week to promote basic literacy and health education, patriotism and social harmony (Vidya Bharati website 2005). The *Vidya Bharati* organization has also set up the *Haflong Project* to ensure its presence in the tribal areas of north-east India where Christian missionaries play a very significant role in school education.

In 1989, the RSS set up another affiliate called *Sewa Bharati*, which is also active in education. This organization, mostly present in north India, opened dispensaries and runs ambulance services but its main activities are related to education. It set up schools in poor neighbourhoods but its understanding of education is not limited to formal education. *Sewa Bharati* has a van with video equipment that goes to slum areas to promote 'moral and cultural education'.[18] The Secretary of *Sewa Bharati* explains that '[e]ducation does not end with the eradication of illiteracy . . . We want to instil in slum-dwellers national awareness and a sense of hygiene, to teach them what is good, what is good for society and how they can be useful to society' (from an undated tract entitled *Sewa Bharati* quoted in Jaffrelot 2001b: 201).

The RSS is also very active in formal education and has founded a widespread network of schools affiliated to *Vidya Bharati Akhil Bhartiya Shikshan Sansthan* (in the following *Vidya Bharati*). This organization, established in 1977, is responsible for most of the RSS's educational projects. It controls the *Vanvasi Kalyan Parishads*, the *Ekal Vidyalayas* and the

Saraswati Shishu Mandirs. The Shishu Mandirs are formal schools. As their name can vary from region to region, they will be referred to as *Vidya Bharati* schools. There are an estimated 22,000 of these schools across India.[19] The Hindu nationalist ideology is clearly visible in the school's environment and in its extracurricular activities. Posters of Hindu gods and goddesses as well as maps of India superimposed with the picture of *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) adorn the classroom walls. Moral and spiritual education is considered an important component of all teaching. Further, for 'secondary' subjects such as physical education and music, these schools follow a curriculum different from the one prescribed by the State Board or the Central Board of Secondary Education (on CBSE, see below). The music course essentially consists of devotional music and patriotic songs and special importance is given to physical education (which includes yoga) so that students can become 'soldiers of the Hindu nation'. This is illustrated by Nandini Sundar (2004) who gives an example from a *Vidya Bharati* school in Chhattisgarh where:

> [a]t the end of the school day, the teacher asks 'Hamari Mata kaun hai?' (who is our mother?), to which the students reply, hands raised, fists clenched: 'Bharat Mata, Bharat Mata'. The teacher then asks twice 'Iski raksha kaun karega?' (who will protect her?), to which they shout back twice 'Hum Karenge' (we will).
>
> (Sarkar 1996: 245)

The children in these schools come mainly from Hindu families but not exclusively. There might also be a small percentage of Christian (mainly Adivasis and Dalits) and Muslim students as the *Vidya Bharati* schools are affordable and enjoy a good reputation with regard to exam results (Sundar 2004). These schools also teach two compulsory supplementary subjects: Sanskrit and a course on Indian culture (*sanskriti gyan pariksha*).[20] However, despite their *hindutva* orientation, the *Vidya Bharati* schools are recognized schools that follow the curriculum prescribed by the CBSE or the State Boards. Accordingly, they use the NCERT textbooks or the one prepared by the regional State Board.[21]

To award official graduation certificates, private schools must be affiliated to a body recognized by the state. They have to follow the programme it prescribes and conduct examinations set by it. Several bodies under different systems offer graduation certificates. The organization having under its control the largest number of schools is the CBSE.[22] The CBSE, though a government organization, functions as an independent body. About 59 per cent of the schools affiliated to the CBSE are private schools (run entirely on private funds or with both public and private funds), and the remaining are different types of schools run by the government. The CBSE sets the syllabus for all classes from nursery to Class XII for the schools affiliated to it. It organizes two centralized exams, one after Class X and the other after Class XII.[23] The schools affiliated to the CBSE use NCERT textbooks (see Figure 2.1). However, some private schools also use the much more expensive textbooks published by private publishers such as Oxford University Press.

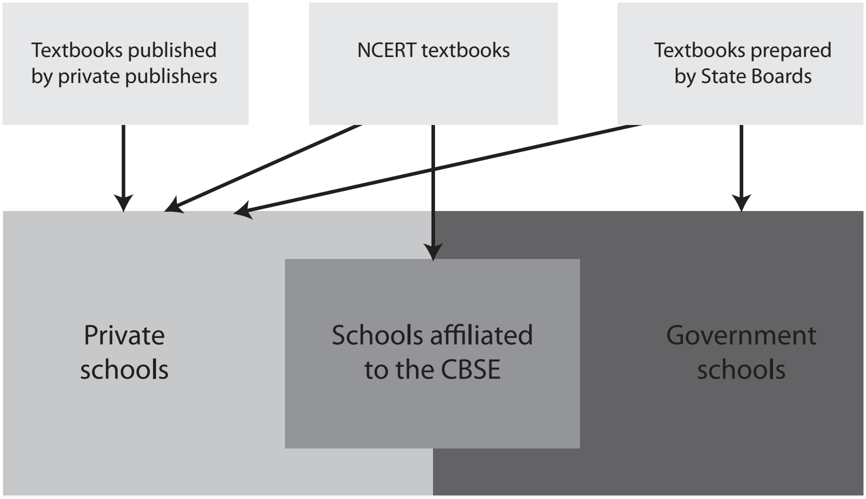


Figure 2.1 Different types of textbooks

The NCERT was established by the Government of India in 1961 to improve teaching methods. In principle, it is an autonomous body, but in practice its powers are limited by the fact that it is financed by the government, which also appoints its director. The NCERT develops the curriculum and prepares model textbooks. It is difficult to know exactly how many children use NCERT textbooks: at the beginning of the 2000s, students enrolled in institutions affiliated to the CBSE represented 3 to 5 per cent of the total student population but there were, in addition, the students from the states and Union Territories where all the recognized schools were affiliated with the Central Board.[24] In these states and Union Territories, all children studying in government schools use NCERT textbooks. This might represent another 7 per cent. We may therefore assume that about 10 per cent of students directly used the textbooks prepared by NCERT. Since 2004, the number of states adopting the NCERT textbooks has increased to reach 15 in 2009. This means that the number of students using NCERT textbooks has also increased. According to some estimates, it would amount to 32 per cent of schoolchildren (Mukherji and Mukul 2009 ToI). Most others use textbooks prepared by the State Boards.

The old textbooks: a secular nationalist interpretation of history

Prior to the NCERT's first set of textbooks published at the end of the 1960s, there were no model textbooks that could be prescribed all over the country. Each state was selecting the books to be used in the state (GoI 1958). In 1961,

UNESCO organized a review of a sample of textbooks used in the teaching of history in schools in the Union territory of Delhi. The historian Romila Thapar, then in her late twenties was asked if she would survey the books. She accepted. Her report highlighted that these books contained outdated ideas and colonial stereotypes (Thapar 2009: 87). Later, Romila Thapar was solicited by the NCERT to write a history textbook for Class VI on Ancient India. It was published in 1968 and gradually other textbooks were commissioned: Bipan Chandra prepared a textbook on *Modern India* (1970), Ram Sharan Sharma on *Ancient India* (1977), Satish Chandra wrote on *Medieval India* (1978) and Arjun Dev on *India and the World*.[25]

The historians approached in the 1960s and 1970s were inscribed in a certain context, which influenced their way of conceptualizing history and influenced even more their way of writing the textbooks: they wrote history textbooks for a young country only a decade after it became independent. Moreover, the trauma of Partition was still alive in memories. These historians felt that it was their duty to help elaborate the new history textbooks. At the time, it was understood as a 'national cause' (Thapar 2009). This sentiment of national duty was linked with the idea that it was necessary to participate in the building of a democratic and secular India. History as a discipline – and all the more history taught in schools and schools textbooks – bore the heavy burden of participating in building a cohesive nation.

In 1969, a Report of the Committee on School Textbooks reaffirms the importance of the teaching of history for uniting the 'nation':

> One of the most sensitive areas demanding delicate handling lies in the preparation of textbooks for history in the schools. The discipline of the subject requires objectivity and precision and dispassionate study of facts. . . . There is, however, an element of interpretation in the treatment of historical data and it is essential to ensure that history is interpreted in a manner which will assist in the cultivation of understanding and in promoting the sense of national integration. . . . Greatest care and caution must be exercised by knowledgeable writers in including material which will neither entail sacrifice of truth nor of the elements required for the building up of a peaceful, tolerant-minded and united nation.
>
> (GoI 1969: 11–12)

This conception of the role of history for nation-building brings to mind the well-known formulation of Ernest Renan. In 'What is a nation?' (Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?), originally a conference held at La Sorbonne in 1882, this French historian and philosopher put forward that not only remembering but also forgetting was required for nation-building: 'Forgetting, and I would even say historical error, are essential factors for nation-building . . .'.[26] Building on Renan's idea, it seems that representation of history in the earlier textbooks aimed at promoting a particular vision of the Indian nation requiring, among other things, certain amnesic episodes to minimize the tensions between the

different communities. The aim of these books was, indeed, to promote the building of a secular national identity.

The historians who wrote the first set of textbooks shared Leftist sensibilities[27] and were influenced (to different degrees) by the then prominent Marxist historiography, but above all they supported a secular conception of nationalism that influenced the way they viewed and presented history. This is reflected in the choices they made while writing the textbooks. This series of textbooks is considered by its admirers as well as by its critics to represent 'the left-nationalist' or 'Nehruvian' perception of Indian history (Powell 1996: 193). These textbooks have some common features resulting from their authors' effort to bring out and present a kind of secularist consensual version of Indian history. Four main points can be singled out as expression of the ideological predilection of their authors: the negligible role given to religion as a factor in history, the absence of the glorification of the Hindu past; the promotion of the ideals of tolerance and harmony; and the predominance of the Congress Party as representing the Indian nation (Pathak 2002: 112–20).

The first point lies at the heart of secular historiography as a counter-narrative to communalism (see Chapter 1). Accordingly, the secular historians who wrote the first set of textbooks gave nearly no explanatory force to religion but laid much stress on socioeconomic factors (Powell 1996: 199; see also Hoffmann 2001; Rudolph and Rudolph 1983). For instance, Satish Chandra devotes five pages in his textbook *Medieval India* to the analysis of Aurangzeb's reign. The explanation that he advances for the measures taken by Aurangzeb illustrates the respective weight assigned to the possible reasons of conflict: 'Aurangzeb took a number of measures which have been called puritanical, but many of which were really of an economic and social character, and against superstitious belief' (Chandra 2004: 229). Bipan Chandra put forth the same type of argument in his textbook *Modern India* for Class XII. He writes that British and Indian historians before independence 'failed to bring out the fact that ancient and medieval politics in India, as politics everywhere else, were based on economic and political interests and not on religious considerations' (Chandra 2004: 206).

The second point is to be understood within the wider question of periodization of Indian history. Orientalist historians[28] distinguished three phases in Indian history: Hindu, Muslim and British. This distinction was taken over by nationalist historiography. Or more precisely, the latter adopted and followed the periodization developed for Europe by European historiography and divided history into a classical golden age, a medieval period of decline and a modern renaissance (Chatterjee 1993: 102). Applied to India, this translated into a 'Vedic' golden age, a 'Muslim' period of decline and a 'nationalist' renaissance. This historiography, though opposed to the Orientalist approach, resorted to the glorification of the classical civilization followed by a long period of decline, which explained, in particular, the British victory. This periodization has remained influential and is still at the core of the Hindu nationalist conception of Indian history despite the fact that it has been widely criticized.

Secular historians in the 1960s, who did not want to explain Indian history in terms of religion, certainly found fault with a periodization precisely based on religion. They questioned its validity for several cumulative and interdependent reasons: first, because it suffered from a heavy colonial influence; second, because it is based on the criteria of the rulers' religion, which is not only problematic in its application (Mukhia 1999: 25 and 30–2)[29] but also suggests that religion is the foundational factor of Indian history (Bhattacharya 2009: 102); third, because this periodization can be applied only to the Gangetic valley where Hindu dynasties actually ruled until the early thirteenth century and were then followed by Muslim rulers. In the rest of the subcontinent, the date of the establishment of Muslim rule varies from region to region.[30] Thus the pivotal dates of 1000BC and AD1200 generally used by historians, refer only to the history of one part of North India (Thapar 1999a: 9–10); fourth, because it resulted in a heavily value-laden conception of history glorifying the Hindu period and painting a black picture of the 'Muslim' one. The historians writing the first textbooks rejected particularly the idea that ancient India was an idyllic period, a golden age. They also discarded the tendency to portray Muslim rulers of the medieval period as outsiders and hold them responsible for the so-called decline of Indian civilization during the medieval period. In order not to reproduce this bias, they chose a periodization between an ancient, a medieval and a modern history of India.

As far as the *presentation of ancient Indian history* is concerned, Pathak shows that in *Ancient India* for Class VI Thapar systematically avoids glorifying the Hindu past. 'To put it in a nutshell, it would seem as though an attempt has been made to demystify the Vedic age. Not just that; the text wants the child to remember the story of power and conflict, not the Vedic hymns pleading for spiritual knowledge and the realization of the Self' (Pathak 2002: 113). The desire not to idealize this period is also visible in the account of the Gupta Empire. The text certainly informs us about the various achievements of this dynasty, but the author also stresses the practice of untouchability:

> Society was divided into castes, most of which lived in harmony together. But there was one group in the towns that was badly treated – the untouchables. They had to live outside the town, separate from the rest of the townspeople. They were regarded as so impure that high caste people could not even look at them. This certainly does not speak well of the Gupta society. So much unkindness to other human beings was a serious flaw.
> (Thapar 1993: 97)

This critical rendering of the history of ancient India was a reaction against the glorification of this period as a golden age that was the rule in communalist but also in nationalist historiography.[31]

The *insistence on the ideals of tolerance, harmony and justice* while narrating historical events is another tendency characteristic of the old textbooks and very

typical of the ideals of secular nationalism. By emphasizing these values, the authors sought to impress them on the minds of their readers. The very positive representation of Ashoka (in the textbook on ancient India) and of Akbar (in the one on medieval India) are significant in this regard. Thapar describes Ashoka (*c.*265–238 BC or *c.*273–232 BC) as the most famous of the Maurya kings and one of India's greatest rulers (Thapar 1993: 60–1). As for the Mughal emperor Akbar (who ruled from 1556 to 1605), he is described as follows:

> Akbar was a great ruler not because he ruled a vast empire, but because of his concern for the country and the people. . . . In many ways Akbar had the same ideas about ruling as did Ashoka. Ashoka said in one of his edicts 'All men are my children.' If Akbar had known about this he would have agreed with it. Akbar's great dream was that India should be united as one country. People should forget their differences about religion and think of themselves only as the people of India. . . . Akbar had one great quality. He was fearless. He showed boldness and courage in physical feats when he rode and tamed angry elephants or swam across rivers in full flood. He also showed courage when he opposed those who used their power and orthodoxy in trying to keep back new ideas and preventing changes from taking place in Indian society and Indian thinking. It was a fearlessness which was rooted in honesty and this is a rare quality.
>
> (Thapar 2001: 94–5)

With regard to the treatment of Mughal emperors, it should be pointed out that there is a whole chapter on Akbar, a ruler symbolizing tolerance, while only two paragraphs are devoted to the reign of Aurangzeb (who ruled from 1658 to 1707), the embodiment of politico-religious[32] fanaticism and repression in popular imagination, regardless of the historical accuracy of this representation. Akbar epitomizes the secular narrative whereas Aurangzeb offers proofs to the Hindu nationalist one. Each narrative emphasizes the character that strengthens its vision and is ill at ease with the one that does not fit in its frame of understanding (for further development see Bhattacharya 2008).

The positive assessment of the Mughal period in the old textbooks contrasts sharply with the one in the NDA textbooks, which insist in their narrative on the tensions caused by those they portray as foreign invaders. According to the old textbooks, the Mughals 'made India their home'. This integration is highlighted in the following passage from the book on medieval India by contrasting it with the behaviour of the Portuguese in India who did not wish to be assimilated into the country:

> The Portuguese came to India to trade. . . . The Portuguese never wanted to make India their home. . . . They wanted to convert as many Indians as possible to the Roman Catholic form of Christianity. They were intolerant

> of the existing religions of India and did not hesitate to force people to become Christian. . . . In contrast to this the coming of the Mughals to India had totally different results. The Mughals did not come to trade. They came to acquire a kingdom and this they succeeded in doing. A bigger difference was that the Mughals made India their home. They settled here and became a part of the Indian population. They were concerned with the welfare of India. Nor were the Mughals interested in converting large numbers of Indians to their religion. There were already many Muslims in India and the Mughals with the exception of Aurangzeb were tolerant of all religions.
>
> (Thapar 2001: 83–4)

History, as narrated in the above passage, is intended to stress Hindu–Muslim unity. The description of the *Sufi* and *bhakti* traditions under the Delhi Sultanate (from the early thirteenth century to the early fifteenth century) is in line with this approach (e.g. see Thapar 1989: 54 and Thapar 2001: 53). These traditions are commonly presented as syncretic and the idea of syncretism is generally associated with tolerance.[33] The secular narrative deals at length with the cases of tolerance and harmony between different religious communities in Indian history and mentions only hastily and summarily episodes of violence and tension.

Concerning the treatment of the medieval period, Hindu nationalists accused secular historians of being lenient towards Muslim rulers when describing their actions in India and ignoring the violence they perpetrated such as the destruction of temples and forced conversions. Hindu nationalists accused the secularists of negationism because the latter ignored Muslim brutality and the resultant Hindu deaths (e.g. see Elst 1992; Gautier 2003: 37–40). Yet, Hindu nationalists are not the only ones to think that the secular historians' avoidance of mentioning conflicts between religious communities is problematic. Other scholars, who are not sympathetic to Hindu nationalism, have made similar observations for different reasons. Among them, P.B. Mehta notes that

> We have never really questioned the assumption that the purpose of teaching subjects like history at school, is to produce a past in the service of the nation. The dominant non-BJP histories did this by eliding any possible differences between religious communities within the nation. On this view, there were no religious or ideological differences between communities that could not be explained away by the imperatives of seeking wealth or power. Or, when all else failed we simply described this conflict as 'communal' or 'obscurantist', thus disavowing the possibility of genuine disagreement.
>
> (Mehta 2004 *Tehelka*)

The third element reflecting the adherence of the textbooks' writers to secular nationalism is the *privileged position given to the Congress* in the narrative,

to the detriment of other political movements. It reflects the adherence of these authors to secular nationalism. The textbooks promote the Congress's nationalism by assigning to it the attributes of a progressive force that defended the nation's unity and freedom against colonial exploitation and communal division. A passage from *Modern India* by Arjun and Indira Dev illustrates this hagiographical representation of Congress's nationalism:

> While the nationalist movement stood for the reconstruction of Indian society on the basis of equality of all Indians, the communal parties were opposed even to social reforms. According to them, the interests of all Indians were not common. That is why, instead of fighting for independence, they concentrated their energies on getting concessions from the British government for their respective communities. . . . The activities of the communal parties took a dangerous turn when they started saying that the Indian people were not one nation. They advanced the theory that there were two nations in India, the Hindus and the Muslims. While the nationalist movement united the people on the basis of their common aspirations to take India on the road to progress, the communal parties questioned the very basis of Indian nationhood. As you have read in your books on ancient and medieval India, the Indian people, through the centuries of their history, had developed a rich common culture. It was rich because of its variety. The Indian nation consisted of people who followed different religions, spoke different languages and practised different customs. This richness has been a source of pride to the Indian people and is something to be cherished. The communal parties tried to divide them.
>
> (Dev and Dev 1991: 239–40, quoted in Pathak 2002: 118–19)

Secular historians also drew attention to the decision of the *Hindu Mahasabha* to cooperate with the British during the Second World War in order to win their support for the Hindus 'and particularly so that the latter could be recruited in the army and acquire the martial skills necessary to "resist" the Muslims' (Jaffrelot 1994: 556). On the other hand, these historians turned a blind eye to the failure of the Communist party of India to participate in the struggle for independence.[34] Hindu nationalist historians adopted a similar approach, but the roles were reversed: in the NDA textbooks on contemporary India, they highlighted the fact that the Communist Party did not play an active part in the struggle for independence but kept silent about the lack of participation of Hindu communalist parties.

In the textbooks written by secular historians, the Congress is the principal actor in the struggle for independence. For instance, the Congress is omnipresent in the four chapters devoted to this period by Arjun and Indira Dev. The history of the struggle for independence is described in such a manner that it becomes synonymous with the Congress Party's history. The text does

mention the roles of Chandra Sekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh and Subash Chandra Bose as well as the movements for the emancipation of the oppressed classes and castes under leaders such as E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker and B.R. Ambedkar. However, the text presents the Congress's nationalism as a consensual experience and leaves hardly any place to its detractors, dismissing them as being dangerous for the country's unity (Pathak 2002: 119–21).

Consequently, secular nationalist historiography transmits a deprecatory view of the Muslim League in general and of Jinnah in particular (Rai 2006). As a matter of fact, secular historians determined to stress unity between Hindus and Muslims in India, do not consider seriously the two-nation theory supported by the Muslim League and treat it as an 'unscientific and unhistorical theory' (see Chandra's quotation below).[35] Most of the textbooks dwell on the birth of the Muslim League as well as its actions and hold it responsible for India's partition. Let's take an example in the *Modern India* textbook by B. Chandra: the narrative teems with a large variety of heroes and villains. The British *Raj* is ranked among the villains and the Congress Party is prominent among the heroes. Apart from the British government, the group of villains also includes communalists (both Hindu and Muslim) (Rai 2006: 235). About the period extending from 1935 to 1939 Bipan Chandra writes:

> The Muslim League, led by Jinnah, turned to bitter opposition to the Congress. It began to spread the cry that the Muslim minority was in danger of being engulfed by the Hindu majority. *It propagated the unscientific and unhistorical theory that Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations which could, therefore, never live together*. In 1940, the Muslim league passed a resolution demanding partition of the country and the creation of a state to be called Pakistan after independence. The Muslim league propaganda gained by the existence of such communal bodies among the Hindus as the Hindu Mahasabha.
>
> (Chandra 2004: 258–9, emphasis added)

We see here that the nationalist secularists equally condemned Muslim *and* Hindu communalism whereas, as we will see later, the textbooks rewritten by Hindu nationalist historians considered the Muslim League (and particularly Jinnah) as being solely responsible for the partition and made no mention of Hindu communalism.

The old textbooks were in use from the 1970s until 2002. During this period, their contents remained practically unchanged. These textbooks were revised but the revisions were limited to minor changes. However, during this interval, the way of looking at history had changed and historical research had brought to light new elements that were not reflected in the textbooks. I believe that the static approach of these books can be explained by the desire to build and establish a 'common history', a 'common past'. In order to fulfil its role as a *builder of national unity*, the historical narrative had to remain unchanged. The old textbooks were used until 2002 when they were replaced by new

books and the version of history that they presented was called into question by a new version of official history.

Conclusion: 'received' and 'rival' perspectives

The NCERT history textbooks encapsulated the secular or 'received' view of Indian history. It can be termed 'received', following Krishna Kumar's appellation (1996), because until 1998 it was the conception favoured by the government. However, the 'rival' or Hindu nationalist perspective was far from being inaudible. It was, on the contrary, a very common representation of history. A recent study on the *Amar Chitra Katha* (ACK, immortal picture stories) suggests that these immensely popular comic books participated in the diffusion of this view of the Indian past. This comic series started in 1967 and published more than 400 titles. A lot of these stories depict historicized myths. Yet, despite the comic format, these books were intended to educate their readers. The motto was 'education with entertainment' (Chandra 2008: 45).

According to Nandini Chandra, ACK was envisaged by its creator as a way to counterbalance and correct the erroneous view of history that was presented in NCERT textbooks. ACK's narratives presented a past in which upper-caste Hindus were the heroes and Muslims the enemies:

> The biggest lie that the state version of history has supposedly implicated itself in is that it recognizes Muslims to be Indians. In order to correct this fallacy, ACK seeks to reveal the brutal history of conquest, plunder and pillage that was Muslim medieval India, thus demonstrating the fact that Muslims are outsiders.
>
> (Chandra 2008: 41)

Yet, ACK was not directly identified with the Hindu communal project[36] and it enjoyed a wide readership.

3 The debate in context

The precedents: 1977 and the BJP-governed states

The old textbooks were in use for more than 30 years. During these three decades they rode out several storms but they also enjoyed long moments of quietness. However, their authors had to face a first salvo of criticisms the moment the books were published. It came from Hindu and Sikh religious organizations who thought that their religious teachers were not sufficiently glorified in the textbooks' narrative (Thapar 2009: 94). Moreover, some religio-political organizations such as the *Hindu Mahasabha* and the *Arya Samaj* argued that some assertions contained in the books were hurting Hindu religious sentiments. Most of the incriminated passages were about beef eating in Ancient India. The historians who wrote the textbooks had mentioned that the ancient Aryans ate cow flesh on ritual occasions or for honouring a guest. The other objectionable statements were those in which the authors affirmed that Shudras – people belonging to the lowest *varna* of the caste system – were sometimes ill treated. The first chapter of the controversy was forcibly closed in 1975 when Indira Gandhi declared the Emergency that shut down free press and free discussion (Thapar 2009: 94).

In 1977, the Janata Party won the elections marking the end of the Emergency. This party, whose main aim was to oppose the domination of the Congress, was formed by the coming together of six political parties among which was the Hindu nationalists BJS. Shortly after it gained power, the Janata government received an anonymous note proposing to proscribe several textbooks used in government schools, alleging that their content was anti-Indian and anti-national and that they were 'prejudicial to the study of history' (Thapar 2009: 95). The incriminated books were three textbooks published by the NCERT: *Ancient India* (1977) by R.S. Sharma, *Medieval India* (1967) by R. Thapar and *Modern India* (1970) by B. Chandra.[1] In 1978, the Janata government actually withdrew Sharma's book from the 1,100 schools then affiliated to the CBSE and reduced the distribution of the books by Thapar and Chandra (Behera 1996: 200). These books were criticized mainly because they explained conflicts in political rather than religious terms and because of their lack of pro-Hindu enthusiasm. For instance, Chandra's *Modern India* portrayed in an excessively negative manner – according to its detractors – nationalist

heroes such as Tilak and Aurobindo Ghose (Rudolph and Rudolph 1983: 26–7). In a recent article, Romila Thapar summarizes the criticisms addressed to the textbooks:

> the issues that were raised by our critics were routine and predictable: why did the books mention beef-eating? why didn't they state that the Aryans were indigenous to India? where was the necessity to mention the disabilities of the lower castes? why did we not consistently depict the Muslims rulers as oppressors and tyrants? – and so on.
>
> (Thapar 2009: 95)

The BJS exerted its influence through the Janata Party not only on textbooks but also on the appointment of members in institutions funded by the government. Thus, the BJS representatives in the Janata government attempted to appoint a new director to head the ICHR, but this gave rise to so much opposition from historians that the project was given up. The BJP nevertheless managed to get several members removed from the Council and have them replaced by members more favourable to the *Hindutva* ideology. The Janata Party justified its interference as a necessity to set right the Congress Party's partisan attitude favouring secularism and Leftist views in the selection of textbooks' writers and in the appointment of members of research institutions (Rudolph and Rudolph 1983: 19).

However, this attempt to rewrite textbooks did not succeed and after the change of government in 1979, the proposal to modify textbooks was given up. The failure of the BJS to implement its educational reforms was mainly due to the structure of the government coalition in which it did not occupy a dominant position. Besides, in 1977, the *Sangh Parivar* was able to put only a small number of its sympathizers in institutions associated with education and research. This resulted in the NCERT opposing the initiative taken by the government. The NCERT examined the arguments advanced for the replacement of some textbooks, but found them not sufficiently convincing. Moreover, the Janata government's education minister was not a supporter of Hindu nationalism.

What the BJS tried to achieve between 1977 and 79, its successor, the BJP, accomplished some 12 years later in some states (and 20 years later at the national level). The debate on the rewriting of history textbooks resurfaced in 1991 when the BJP won the elections in the four North Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan.[2] At that time, the RSS released a memorandum in which it demanded an end to the distortions inflicted on history in the education system. This demand was heeded by the then education minister of Uttar Pradesh, Rajnath Singh, who announced that the state's education system would henceforth be *dharma sapeksh* (pro-religious) (Behera 1996: 200–1). As a consequence, Vedic mathematics found a place in the school syllabus, and the content of history textbooks was suitably modified. For instance, in the Class VI history textbook, chapters on Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln were removed and a chapter on the founder of the RSS, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar was added as well as a chapter entitled

'Religious Policies of Babar' describing how Babar (or Babur) destroyed the Ram temple in Ayodhya in the sixteenth century to build a mosque on its ruins (Iype 1998b RoN). In 1992, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Kalyan Singh, justified these changes in history textbooks by arguing that they would 'Indianise the real picture of history' (Iype 1998b RoN). The governments of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh also gave recognition to schools run by *Vidya Bharati*, which, as an alternative educational network, was allowed to organize its own examinations from Class V to Class VIII.[3]

In 1993, the NCERT set up a committee to evaluate school textbooks. One report was issued the same year and a second in 1994. The 1993 report concerned, among other things, the history textbooks of Uttar Pradesh. The committee contended that their reading of history, particularly medieval Indian history, was so blatantly communal that they should be withdrawn (Menon and Rajalakshmi 1998 FL). The 1994 report scrutinized the history syllabi and textbooks used in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh, as well as the Hindi textbooks of Madhya Pradesh and the series entitled *Sanskriti Gyan* (cf. ch. 2 n.20) published by *Vidya Bharati*. Regarding the *Vidya Bharati* publications, the report concluded:

> Much of this material is designed to promote bigotry and religious fanaticism in the name of inculcating knowledge of culture in the young generation. That this material is being used as teaching and examination material in schools which, presumably, have been accorded recognition should be a matter of serious concern.
>
> (National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation 1994: 94)

But the books of the *Sanskriti Gyan* series were not the only ones incriminated for transmitting a communal vision of history. The 1994 report holds that the textbooks used in Assam, particularly for teaching medieval Indian history, had much the same perspective, as well as the history textbooks used in Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh (National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation 1994: 3–6). In 1998, NCERT members denounced once again the Hindu nationalist bias in some history textbooks used in government schools in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan (Iype 1998c RoN).

Concerned observers followed closely the educational reforms implemented by the BJP in the states. They drew attention to the fact that the BJP, when it came to power in a state, redesigned the curriculum on the model of the system of the *Vidya Bharati* schools. The changes made in these states were, in fact, the harbingers of the reforms introduced by the BJP when it came to power at the Centre. It can be argued that the Hindu nationalists learned a lesson from their failure in 1977. Whereas the BJS started by attacking history textbooks and failed because it lacked the necessary institutional support (more importantly within the NCERT), the BJP in 1998 started by appointing its sympathizers in institutions in charge of education. They then had the decisional power to implement the changes.[4]

Mission accomplished (1998–2004): BJP-driven changes in school education and 'saffronization'

Appointments

Several scholars have drawn attention to the oscillation of the BJP's discourse between moderation and radicalism (Basu 2001; Jaffrelot 1993). This oscillation (which often results in a Janus-faced discourse) was institutionalized under the BJP-led government by appointing the moderate Atal Behari Vajpayee to the post of prime minister and the more militant Lal Krishna Advani to the post of home minister and later deputy prime minister. The Vajpayee–Advani tandem testifies to the BJP's desire to maintain a double-faced identity. It also shows the weight it gives to each position (Basu 2000: 400).

However, the appointments in the field of education did not give any voice to the moderate wing: the two highest positions were given to candidates close to the RSS. Murli Manohar Joshi was appointed minister of human resource development and Uma Bharati was made minister of state in the same ministry.[5] Uma Bharati was a member of the VHP. She made a name for herself through her passionate speeches in defence of the Hindu nation and was accused of encouraging the crowd during the destruction of the *Babri Masjid* in Ayodhya.

M.M. Joshi, who became minister of human resource development (HRD), is also known as a fervent supporter of Hindu nationalist ideas. He holds a doctorate in physics from the Allahabad University where he served as a professor in parallel with his political career. He began participating in RSS activities in 1944 when he was only 10 years old. In 1949, he joined the *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad*, a students' organization linked to the RSS, and in 1957 the BJS. In 1977, he was elected to the *Lok Sabha* and became the general secretary of the Janata Party in Parliament. Following the dissolution of this party in 1980, he took part in setting up the BJP of which he was president from 1991 to 1993.

Soon after Joshi's nomination as HRD minister, the chief ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu addressed a joint letter to Vajpayee expressing their uneasiness about the new minister's intentions. They were reacting to the information that Joshi had set up a committee to implement the BJP's cultural agenda in the field of education. Joshi had, in fact, decided to submit recommendations proposed by *Vidya Bharati* for discussion during the conference of education ministers of states and Union Territories that was to take place in October 1998 (Iype 1998a RoN).

The conference agenda, distributed in advance, indeed included in the annex a series of recommendations whose authors were described only as 'a group of experts' (Muralidharan and Pande 1998 FL). The changes proposed in this report sought to 'nationalise, Indianise and spiritualise education' (Ramakrishnan 1998 FL).[6] With this purpose in mind, it planned to make the study of Sanskrit compulsory from Classes III to X, to teach the *Vedas* and

the *Upanishads* (Hindu sacred texts) in addition to introducing a moral and spiritual component in school education. The suggestions also included the introduction of a course in domestic science for girl students at the secondary level. It further deemed it necessary to amend Article 30 of the Constitution, which guarantees the minorities the right to establish and run educational institutions, so that all religious groups would be free to set up their own educational institutions. These recommendations were to be presented by an industrialist from Calcutta whose only connection with school education turned out to be his participation in *Vidya Bharati*'s activities. Furthermore, Joshi planned to replace the singing of the national anthem at the beginning of the conference by the singing of *Saraswati Vandana*, a Sanskrit hymn in praise of *Saraswati*, the Hindu goddess of learning.

Fifteen education ministers, warned of these changes before the conference, informed the organizers that they would not participate under these conditions. Faced with the resistance of half the quorum, Joshi was obliged to adopt a more conciliatory attitude. Consequently, the conference began with the singing of the national anthem and not the *Saraswati Vandana*, the recommendations in the agenda's annex were withdrawn and the presentation by *Vidya Bharati*'s representative was cancelled (Muralidharan and Pande 1998 FL).

In spite of the open refusal of several ministers to toe the official line and the critical reports that appeared in the press after the conference, Joshi pursued the intended policy by appointing persons known to be sympathetic to the Hindu nationalist cause to key posts in institutions in charge of school education and research.[7] In 1999, a new president, as well as 12 new members of the academic council, were appointed to the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). The funding of research in humanities and social sciences depends principally on this institution.[8] The membership of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), a central institute in charge of organizing and promoting the study of history, also underwent substantial changes. None of the 12 historians working in the institution before 1998 was reappointed. Among the 18 new members appointed in 1998, eight had been actively engaged in Ayodhya's temple/mosque controversy (Muralidharan 1998 FL). The new president of the ICHR was B.R. Grover, formerly Associate Professor in *Jamia Millia Islamia* and director of the ICHR for 11 years (from 1974 to 1985). He was called back from retirement and made president in October 1999. Grover was known for his commitment to the VHP's Ayodhya campaign. He had been a member of the panel of historians formed by the VHP to provide archaeological 'proofs' in support of the claim that the *Babri Masjid* was built on the site where once stood a temple dedicated to Lord Ram. One of the new members of the ICHR, K.S. Lal, justified these changes by claiming that the Council had been dominated until then by 'leftist historians'. According to him, the present government had simply reversed the situation. The 'leftist historians' reacted by retorting that the Council had always had reputed historians as its members, which was no longer the case with the new appointees (Muralidharan 1998 FL).

In 2000, the ICHR decided to stop the publication of two volumes written by well-known historians Sumit Sarkar and K.N. Panikkar as a part of the *Towards Freedom* Project.[9] The reason given by the ICHR was that the two historians had not submitted as required the proofs of their manuscript for approval before sending it for publication (Muralidharan and Pande 2000 FL).[10] According to the detractors of the Hindu nationalist movement (e.g. see Setalvad 2001a CC), the ICHR's decision to prevent the publication of these volumes was motivated by the fact that these books established – with the support of the necessary documents – that the RSS had not taken part in the struggle for independence that this organization had actually collaborated with the colonial rulers.

Similarly, the new secretary and president of the University Grants Commission (UGC) were close to the Hindu nationalist movement. The UGC is responsible for allocating funds to the Indian universities, for evaluating the need for reforms and for improving teaching at the university level. In February 2001, the Commission decided to introduce a course on *karmakand* (Hindu rituals) and one on *jyotir vigyan* (Vedic astrology – *jyoti* meaning light and *vigyan* science) in the university curriculum. It promised to allocate the amount of Rs.1.5 million to each university teaching Vedic astrology (Sundar 2002: 416). The UGC received requests from 40-odd universities and recommended that astrology departments be set up in 20 of them (Ramachandran 2004 FL).

Opposition was voiced in the press against the Commission's decision, pointing out that Vedic astrology has no scientific basis and has therefore no place in the university curriculum (Jayaraman 2001 FL; SAHMAT and Sabrang 2002: 66–89). Furthermore, in April 2001, three scientists filed a petition in the Andhra Pradesh High Court against the introduction of this subject into the university curriculum. They affirmed that the teaching of astrology violated Article 51A(h) of the Constitution according to which it is the fundamental duty of all citizens to cultivate a scientific spirit. They also felt that teaching astrology implies the imposition of Hindu values in education, which goes against the constitutional principle of secularism. However, the High Court rejected these arguments. The plaintiffs then appealed against this judgment to the Supreme Court. On 5 May 2005, the apex Court confirmed the constitutionality of the introduction of courses in Vedic astrology (Ramachandran 2004 FL).

Let's now turn to the NCERT. A new director was appointed in the person of J.S. Rajput whose sympathy for the Hindu nationalist movement was well known.[11] Moreover Joshi appointed Krishna Gopal Rastogi, a retired NCERT professor and former RSS *pracharak*, as a member of the committee in charge of nominating 60 professors and associate professors in NCERT. Rastogi had gained some notoriety by authoring an autobiographical account of the Partition in which he relates how he killed a Muslim woman to prevent her from being raped by a group of raging Hindus. The book containing this story, whose preface was written by K.S. Sudarshan, then one of the general secretaries of the RSS, is dedicated to the RSS (Asian Age 1999 and Jaffrelot 2001a).

The new curriculum

Shortly after his appointment, Rajput announced that the NCERT was to prepare a new curriculum and new syllabi together with the corresponding textbooks. In 1999, while the curriculum was being prepared, Rajput described the purpose of this project in the following terms:

> The curricula must inculcate and maintain a sense of pride in being an Indian, through understanding of the growth of the Indian civilizations in thought, actions and deeds. The remnants of the alien legacy of the pre-independence period have to be shed completely. It has to be a totally indigenous curriculum.
>
> (Rajput quoted in Muslim India 2000)

SAHMAT[12] organized a three-day conference in August 2001 'against the distinctly sectarian new education curricular policy announced by Murli Manohar Joshi'. The education ministers of nine states took part in this conference, which brought together 500 delegates from all over India (Setalvad 2001b CC).[13]

In spite of the opposition, the NCERT published, in November 2000, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE). It was a very ambitious programme comprising the elimination of inequalities due to gender, caste, religion or ideology; the introduction of personalized teaching for children with special needs; the inclusion of sociocultural perspectives; the promotion of excellence; the strengthening of national identities and conservation of cultural heritage; the integration of information and communication technology in the school syllabus; the restoration of the values of national unity and integration among the people and raising their moral and spiritual level; universal access to elementary education; reducing the burden of the school syllabus; developing social skills or 'emotional literacy'; and the continuous assessment of the student's progress (NCERT 2000: ch. 1).

Some of the goals stated above were new, but most of them, like the universalization of elementary education, were a re-affirmation of goals expressed in earlier official documents.[14] Some elements mentioned in the 2000 curriculum, though already present in earlier documents, were given special attention in the new document. This is the case with the development of 'indigenous knowledge', which is a central theme of the new curriculum. This point has been highlighted by J.S. Rajput in his preface to the document:

> The education system of a country has to be built on the firm ground of its own philosophical, cultural and sociological tradition and must respond to its needs and aspirations. Indigenousness of the curriculum, therefore, is being strongly recommended. It has therefore stressed the need to get education rooted in Indian reality and its composite culture. The awareness

> of India's rich intellectual and cultural heritage and of her contributions to the world civilisation along with those of other countries is strongly urged.
>
> (NCERT 2000: vii–viii)[15]

The beginning of the first chapter, laying down the guiding principles of the reform, also stresses the necessity to again focus on indigenous knowledge. Moreover, it exemplifies the general tone of the document:

> India had an advanced system of education and the world's first universities . . .
>
> As per the British Documents, even the early nineteenth century India had an extensive education system, free from caste and religious discrimination, and almost all the villages had schools.
>
> Then the British introduced their educational system based on grant-in-aid to institutions to impart their kind of education to absorb the products in the civil services. In this scheme, very little of knowledge, attitudes and skills that the local people possessed was considered fit for educational use and was therefore totally discarded. Thus indigenous educational system suffered a set back, and the new system alienated Indian education from the wisdom, the belief and the value system of the people who were uprooted from their tradition.
>
> (NCERT 2000: 1–2)[16]

It is essential to point out that according to the *Sangh Parivar*, indigenous knowledge means Hindu and, more particularly, Vedic knowledge. When the *Sangh Parivar* mentions indigenous knowledge, it does not refer to the knowledge of the tribal people of India who are sometimes called indigenous and often categorized as *Adivasi*, meaning the 'first inhabitants'. Yet the *Sangh* does not grant them the status of first inhabitants and, for this reason, prefers to call them *vanvasi* or 'forest dwellers'.

The promotion of indigenous knowledge announced in the curriculum is a part of a wider Hindu nationalist scheme that aims, on the one hand, to revalorize what is Indian/Hindu and, on the other, to eliminate foreign influences from the education system. In this view, there are mainly three such influences: the colonial influence often embodied by Lord Macaulay, the Marxist/communist influence and the Muslim influence. They can be grouped together as 'the three Ms' (Bakaya 2004) which designate different variations around the terms Macaulay (referring to the English-educated Indians), Marx (referring to the Leftists) and *Madrasas* (referring to the Muslims). Thus Dina Nath Batra says: 'On the one side are ranged the forces of Macaulayism,[17] Marxism and Minorityism. On the other are those who revere the Indian tradition and want the present trends in education to be reversed' (quoted in *The Week* 1998). The Hindu nationalists claimed that it is necessary to finally liberate the country from the vestiges of colonialism as well as other foreign

influences that prevent Indians from fully appreciating their own cultural heritage. This is the viewpoint defended by the authors of the NCFSE:

> [p]aradoxical as it may sound, while our children know about Newton, they do not know about Aryabhatta, they do not know about the advent of the concept of zero or the decimal system. Mention may also have to be made, for instances, of Yoga and Yogic practices as well as the Indian Systems of Medicine . . . like the Ayurvedic and Unani systems which are now being recognised and practised all over the world. The country's curriculum shall have to correct such imbalances.
>
> (NCERT 2000: 13–14)

Despite the arguments advanced in support of the reform, the curriculum attracted severe criticism. The battle between the supporters and opponents to the new curriculum was fought on two grounds: one concerned the content of the document, another concerned the procedures followed for its adoption.

As regards the first aspect, educationists and professionals in the field of education maintained that the content of the document was impracticable[18] and political circles opposed to the BJP denounced the instrumentalization of the curriculum to instil the Hindu nationalist ideology into education (e.g. see Rajalakshmi 2000 FL). They contested the inclusion of yoga and Vedic mathematics in this document as well as the stress on 'value education' and Sanskrit. Critics were concerned with the connection of these subjects with Hinduism and the excessive importance given to the majority religion to the detriment of the minorities.[19] Several detractors felt that the decision to encourage the study of Sanskrit was a result of the Brahmanical view adopted by the NCERT, even more so because it was spelt 'Samskrit' corresponding to 'a very purist way of pronouncing the word. That is a pandit way'.[20] According to the NCERT, the curriculum gives a central place to Sanskrit because this language has been used in India for thousands of years and is still closely associated with the life, rituals, ceremonies and festivals of the Indian people (NCERT 2000: 53–4).[21] The opponents retorted that Sanskrit was neither the subcontinent's only classical language nor was it the most widely used. It was, on the contrary, an exclusivist and elitist symbol of the power of knowledge wielded by the upper castes (Students' Federation of India, s.d.) and its promotion in education was only to benefit upper-caste children already familiar with the language (Natrajan *et al.* 2002).

The inclusion of value education in the curriculum also drew a lot of attention. It was not conceived as a separate subject but values had to be generally integrated into the teaching. Even though the idea of value education was not new, its introduction was always considered sensitive, which is why, in spite of the recommendations of different commissions, it had not been included in the previous curricula (Aggarwal 2001: 134–6). In 2002, those against value education were afraid that the subject would not be treated with the necessary neutrality (despite what was written in the curriculum)[22] and that

it would only be used as a pretext for teaching the Hindu religion and its values. They felt that the NCFSE did not make a clear distinction between religion and values and that the two notions seemed interdependent, if not synonymous, in the minds of the document's authors.

The part of the curriculum devoted to this subject is entitled *Education for Value Development*. It begins with the observation that there has been an erosion of social, moral and spiritual values during the last 50 years. It then sets out in detail the values highlighted in various official documents related to education. After that, the association between religion and values is taken up:

> Another significant factor that merits urgent attention now is religion. Although it is not the only source of essential values, it certainly is a major source of value generation. What is required today *is not religious education but education about religions*, their basics, the values inherent therein and also a comparative study of the philosophy of all religions.
>
> (NCERT 2000: 19, italics in the original)

The national education policy of 1986 and the curriculum drawn up in 1988 already referred to this 'worrying erosion of values'. According to these two documents, education should serve as a tool for cultivating moral and social values in society (GoI 1986: 21; NCERT 1988: 5). Yet, they did not mention religion or the need for a course on religions. However, since independence, several committees have supported the inclusion of the comparative study of religions (and not religious education as such) underlining the benefits of such a course (for an overview of the question, see Sharma 1987). The last committee to deal with this question was the Chavan Committee, which in 1999 submitted a report favourable to the introduction of such a subject.

Let's turn now to the formal aspects of the reform process. NCERT's representatives argued that it was necessary to update the curriculum because the former document was prepared in 1988 and Indian society had changed substantially during this decade. Moreover, as Rajput emphasized in his preface to the NCFSE, the 1986 National Education Policy stated that the policy should be reviewed every five years (NCERT 2000: v). Thus, far from presenting the 2000 curriculum as a break with the previous education policy, its authors positioned themselves in continuity with the preceding documents (in terms of policy and curriculum) by referring to them frequently.

Yet, the opponents to the reform protested that the Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) had not been consulted when preparing the new curriculum as it had been for the previous curricula. This board brings together the education ministers of all the states and Union Territories (as well as external consultants). As such, it constitutes a link between the Centre and the states and a platform where states are consulted as they will implement the curriculum. However, Joshi did not reconstitute the board to evaluate the new curriculum. He certainly preferred not to take the risk of the document

being refused by the CABE. Such an opposition was foreseeable given the state education ministers' opposition to the project at the 1998 conference.

A petition was filed in the Supreme Court in 2002 complaining that the procedure relating to the revision of the curriculum was vitiated by a formal flaw as the CABE had not been consulted.[23] The petitioners[24] also accused the NCFSE of not respecting the constitutional principle of secularism linked to the fundamental rights laid down in Articles 21, 27 and 28 of the Constitution. Article 21 deals with the protection of life and personal liberty. This Article also covers the right to education, development and information. Article 27 concerns the right not to pay compulsory taxes for the promotion of a particular religion, and Article 28 affirms the right to obtain education free from any religious influence. The NCERT defended itself by submitting an affidavit to the Court affirming that the state education ministers had given their consent to the new curriculum (during the 37th meeting of ministers in 2000). However, the education ministers of 16 states declared that they had never approved the curriculum. They protested against what they felt was an attempt by the NCERT to misrepresent their position before the Supreme Court (TH 2002).

Nevertheless, the Court ruled in favour of the NCERT declaring that the validity of the curriculum did not depend on its approval from the CABE because the latter does not have restrictive powers as it is not a statutory body. The new curriculum was, therefore, valid as far as its form was concerned even though it had not been approved by the CABE (Supreme Court 2002). The Court devoted special attention in its judgment to the question of value education.[25] It accepted the distinction made in the curriculum between religious education and education about religions. It also expressed the view that the study of different religions does not violate Articles 21, 27 and 28 of the Constitution as claimed by the plaintiffs. The Supreme Court felt that the curriculum did not propose to introduce religious education, which would effectively violate Article 28, but an education based on the values of different religions, as well as awareness about their common principles (Supreme Court 2002: 49–50).

The BJP's reform project on education drew some legitimacy from the approval of its first stage (the curriculum) by the Supreme Court. Whenever new criticisms arose, the BJP referred to the Court's judgment.

Censoring the old textbooks

The 2000 curriculum brought in a certain number of changes, especially through the introduction of new subjects and the reorganization of some courses. The history course from Class VI to Class X was replaced by a general course in social sciences consisting of elements of geography, civics, economics, sociology and history. The NCFSE set out the goals of this new course as follows:

> It helps the learners in understanding the human environment in its totality and developing a broader perspective and an empirical, reasonable, and humane outlook. It also helps them grow into well-informed and responsible citizens with necessary attributes/skills *so that they could participate and contribute effectively in the process of development and nation-building*.
>
> [. . .]
>
> Teaching of social sciences ought *to promote a humane and national perspective, and inculcate a sense of pride in the country and in being an Indian*. It needs to strengthen the national identity and develop an appreciation for cultural heritage. It should promote communal harmony and social cohesion. Its teaching must be objective and free from all kinds of stereotyped images, biases and prejudices.
>
> (NCERT 2000: 62–4, emphasis added)

The reason for reorganizing the teaching of social sciences is explained in the following words:

> In a world of ever-increasing knowledge, selection and organisation of the content areas assume great importance. The social sciences curriculum has to be comprehensive and not yet heavily loaded with information. Interrelatedness of ideas and their comprehensibility must be kept in view. It would also be desirable to emphasise the process of learning and thinking rather than mere acquisition of facts.
>
> (NCERT 2000: 63)

It is in this context that the space allotted to history was reduced and instead of being taught as a full-fledged subject, it became just one of the several components of the social science syllabus:

> In order to make the social sciences education meaningful, relevant and effective, the concerns and issues of the contemporary world need to be kept in the forefront. To this end, the quantum of history may have to be substantially reduced. Past development could be studied as a backdrop for understanding the present.
>
> (NCERT 2000: 62)

The subject's importance was diminished and the number of topics studied was also limited to give more weight to the study of Indian civilization and its cultural heritage (NCERT 2000: 63–4).

In October 2001, while textbooks were being prepared in accordance with the norms laid down by the NCFSE, the NCERT demanded that some sections in the history textbooks that had been in use until then be removed in response to a complaint made in the Delhi State Assembly by Arvinder Singh Lovely, a member of the Congress Party.[26] The complaint concerned the textbook by

Satish Chandra on medieval India. A.S. Lovely argued that the passage on the execution in 1675 of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru, was derogatory because the latter was described as a plunderer (Kaur 2001 FL; Muralidharan 2001 FL). The Delhi State Assembly demanded the removal of the following passage: 'after his return from Assam, the Guru, in association with one Hafiz Adam, a follower of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, had resorted to plunder and rapine, laying waste the whole province of Punjab'.[27] Chandra objected that these were not his words but those found in a Persian text. He explained that in his textbook he quotes many sources relating to the Guru's execution and its possible causes. Besides, after referring to these different texts, Chandra concludes that Emperor Aurangzeb's decision to execute the Guru was not justified, irrespective of the emperor's motivations (Chandra 2004: 237).

The NCERT decided nonetheless to remove not only the offending sentence but the entire passage on Sikhism at the end of the medieval period in Satish Chandra's textbook as well as 10 passages from other textbooks. In October 2001, the CBSE sent a circular to its affiliated schools asking them not to teach the 10 censored parts. The circular specified that the examination papers would not contain any question related to the incriminated passages. This concerned the above mentioned section in Chandra's textbook plus seven passages from Sharma's textbook on ancient India (for Class XI) that were either questioning the historicity of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* or of religious and mythological figures such as the *tirthankars*, or that presented the consumption of beef[28] and the killing of cows and bulls for sacrifices in ancient India. It also concerned one passage from the textbook *Modern India* written by Arjun Dev and Indira Dev, which describes the dissolution of the authority of the Mughal Emperors in the eighteenth century and the rise of the Jats in Bharatpur as an alternative power centre. Arjun and Indira Dev (1991: 21) wrote that the Jats 'conducted plundering raids in the regions around and participated in the court intrigues at Delhi'. Three sentences in Romila Thapar's book on ancient India were also removed. These sentences explained that in ancient India beef was served in honour of guests but that Brahmins were later not allowed to eat it.[29]

The BJP's opponents argued that the passages were expunged because they did not agree with the 'Brahmanical' version of history that portrays India's past and present as a series of Hindu successes. The same detractors also explained this censorship as an expression of the BJP's desire to remove all reference to India's pluralistic and multi-ethnic history (Bidwai 2001b FL). In their view, the NCERT used Lovely's complaint as a pretext to initiate a censorship movement that allowed it to remove passages that did not correspond to its ideology (especially passages about the consumption of beef in ancient India) and to project itself as a defender of the Sikh, Jain and Jat communities.

The BJP justified its decision by claiming that the 'erased' parts were offending Jat, Jain, Sikh and Hindu communities. V.K. Malhotra, a BJP leader, did not contest the veracity of the facts described in the textbooks but defended

their removal by arguing that textbooks should not contain negative statements about a religion or a religious leader (Vyas 2001 TH). K.R. Malkani's words about the censored passages are very significant in this respect:

> Assuming the above statements to have some truth in them, they are a fit subject for academic discussion. What is their relevance for small school children? Now it is quite possible that some people in ancient India did take beef. (There were times when men used to kill other men and eat their flesh.) The flesh of dead cattle had always been edible for some 'lower' castes. But what is the idea in ridiculing Indian regard for the cow, by saying some people in ancient India took beef?
>
> (Malkani 2001 *The Statesman*)

Moreover, J.S. Rajput pointed out that the NCERT faced several legal cases filed by the communities in question. In order to avoid such incidents in the future, Rajput announced that it would be necessary henceforth to consult religious experts before including any religious references in textbooks. It seems, however, that the number of cases filed was very limited. One case – which was eventually dismissed – had effectively been filed in 1997 in the Punjab High Court regarding the statement about Guru Tegh Bahadur.

In an article in the *Times of India*, Romila Thapar (2001) expressed her surprise concerning the measures taken and their justification. She wrote:

> It is curious . . . that some of our books have been used for almost 40 years – mine on Ancient India has been prescribed since 1966 and I revised it in 1987 – and have not created pedagogic problems. But we are suddenly told that there are 50,000 complaints against them and that certain communities are feeling offended by them.

In December 2001, M.M. Joshi fuelled the controversy by calling for a struggle against the Left's 'intellectual terrorism'. He claimed that this type of terrorism practised by Left-leaning historians, who propagated a false view of history, was more dangerous than cross-border terrorism. Joshi added that these historians showed no consideration for Indian religions and that their version of history was polluting the minds of young children and driving them to fear other religions (*Asian Age* 2001).

The new history textbooks

After the textbooks were published, the controversy concentrated on the history and social sciences textbooks. The textbooks *Contemporary India* for Class IX and *India and the World* for Class VI could be printed only after the Supreme Court lifted the temporary stay imposed on their publication following the introduction of a petition about the curriculum. Waiting the

decision of the Court, the implementation of the curriculum was suspended and, consequently, the publication and sale of the new textbooks was stopped.[30] However, at the end of March 2002, the Supreme Court allowed the NCERT to publish and distribute to sellers all the secondary level textbooks, except those on social sciences and Hindi for which the stay order was lifted only with the Court's final decision on 12 September 2002. The NCERT then introduced the first 'second generation' history textbooks in the academic year 2002–3. A first group of books came out in 2002 (*India and the World*, Class VI; *Contemporary India*, Class IX; *Medieval India*, Class XI; *Ancient India*, Class XI). In 2003, the NCERT brought out four more textbooks (*India and the World*, Class VII; *Contemporary India*, Class X; *Modern India*, Class XII; and *Contemporary World History*, Class XII). *India and the World* for Class VIII came out only in February 2004.

Rajput and the other defenders of the reforms (who expressed their opinion among others in the RSS weekly, *Organiser*) put forward two main arguments to justify the introduction of the new textbooks. The first argument was that the old books were outdated. They needed to be revised and brought up to date as they did not reflect the present state of historical research. Further, it was no longer appropriate to have books only on history as this subject was no longer taught separately in Classes VI to X. The second argument concerned the Marxist view of history transmitted by these textbooks that needed to be urgently corrected. For those who defended the reforms, the necessity to remedy the propagation of a Marxist historiography was all the more urgent as the collapse of the Soviet Bloc signified the failure of communism and was a proof that the Marxist approach was obsolete.

However, the newly published textbooks were under serious scrutiny from historians and other concerned intellectuals worried by the Hindu nationalist project.[31] The press provided an important platform to the different actors of the two opposed camps. A large number of articles analysed or commented upon the various textbooks. In 2003, the Indian History Congress, an organization bringing together academics working in the fields of history and archaeology, published a report enumerating the errors contained in the first four published textbooks[32] (Habib *et al.* 2003). The authors of the NDA textbooks defended their position in a document published by the NCERT in 2003 entitled *History in the New NCERT Textbooks: Fallacies in the IHC Report* (Lal *et al.* 2003). Makkhan Lal developed his response further in his 2005 book *Educating to Confuse and Disrupt*. A large portion of it is a counter-attack and a refutation of the criticisms that had appeared in the press and in the report of the Indian History Congress.

Moreover, an evaluation of the NDA textbooks was undertaken in 2005 after the change of government. The UPA government set up a commission of three experts to evaluate the history portion of the social science textbooks as well as the history textbooks (GoI 2004). The commission recommended that these books should be immediately withdrawn, but the government decided to continue using them till the end of the school year. The NCERT then published

a manual for teachers in which the stumbling blocks were discussed. This manual also addressed the question of the approach to be adopted to avoid confusing students confronted with several versions of the same event (NCERT 2004).

The principal points of criticism against the NDA textbooks can be grouped under five categories: poor quality,[33] pedagogical problems,[34] plagiarism, omissions and ideological distortions. Given the subject of my study, I will only deal with the last three categories.

Plagiarism

Three cases of *plagiarism* were pointed at. First, the authors of the book *Contemporary World History* (Class XII) were accused of using parts of an American textbook without mentioning their source (Rajalakshmi 2003b FL; SAHMAT 2003: 14–33).[35] Considering the expressed desire of the curriculum's authors to make education more 'Indian', the use of an American book gave rise to sarcastic remarks: 'So this is how the guardians of Brahmanical Hinduism were setting about their task of correcting a perceived historical bias – riding on pilfered scholarship. These, then, were their tools – of foreign origin' (IE 2003). Second, some passages of the book *Modern India* (Class XII) are said to have been copied from the ninth volume of *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance* by R.C. Majumdar, an historian known for his communalist reading of Indian history. Finally, the author of the book *Ancient India* (Class XI) is said to have taken passages, also without acknowledging his sources, from Romila Thapar's book for Class VII and Satish Chandra's book for Class XI (Jha 2003b FL). Critics pointed out how ironical it was that the rewriting of textbooks should be justified by claiming that the previous textbooks had become obsolete but that their content and structure should be partly reproduced in the new books (Jha 2002: 39–44).

Omissions

One case of 'forgetting' particularly caught public attention: the textbook *Contemporary India* for Class IX did not mention Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. Gandhi was killed in 1948 by Nathuram Godse. The latter was a member of the RSS until the early 1940s when he decided to set up his own organization, the *Hindu Rashtra Dal*, because he found that the RSS was not militant enough. He and his associates were also closely associated with the *Hindu Mahasabha*. After the Mahatma's death, the RSS was accused of being involved in the murder and the organization was banned until July 1949.

The textbook *Contemporary India*, published by the NCERT in August 2002, was withdrawn for correction shortly after its appearance and reprinted in October 2002 with one extra sentence (in italics in the quote below). In the single paragraph describing the event Gandhi's assassination is introduced as follows:

> Gandhiji was away to Calcutta when on 15 August, India won independence. He was busy there in restoring communal harmony between the Muslims and the Hindus. When the ministers in the West Bengal Government met Gandhiji with a view to seek his blessings on the Independence Day, Gandhiji told them: 'Be humble, Beware of power. Power corrupts . . . Remember, you are in office to serve the poor India's villages.' *Gandhiji's efforts to bring peace and harmony in society came to a sudden and tragic end due to his assassination by Nathuram Godse on January 30, 1948, in Delhi while Gandhiji was on his way to attend a prayer meeting.*
>
> (Om *et al.* 2003: 57)

The NDA textbook gives so little information that it leaves the reader perplexed about the reasons for the Mahatma's assassination. The text describes Gandhi warning members of the West Bengal government about the perils of power and reminding them that their duty is to serve India's poor villages. Then the text continues, without any other explanation, to Gandhi's assassination and the next paragraph follows with a description of the first government of free India.

The addition of one sentence in the re-edition of the textbook did not satisfy the critics who thought that it was insufficient. They felt that it was necessary to mention Nathuram Godse's relationship with the RSS and the *Hindu Mahasabha* (and with its leader Savarkar), as well as the ban on the two organizations between 1948 and 1949 even if the RSS and Savarkar claimed not to have had links with the conspirators of Gandhi's murder. They argued that the vagueness about Gandhi's death is an attempt to conceal the link between the murderer of the 'father of the nation' and the Hindu nationalist organizations (Mukherjee *et al.* 2008: 44; Peer 2002 RoN).[36]

SAHMAT published in December 2002 a collection of critical articles on the textbooks with a cartoon on the cover (originally published in the *Indian Express*) showing M.M. Joshi standing before a class of students explaining how Gandhi died: 'Gandhi bugged Brits with too many questions. They threw him out of the rail coach. He died. Any questions?' (Figure 3.1).

The omission of Gandhi's assassination gave rise to a large number of indignant comments on this lacuna, which attributed it to the BJP's desire to deliberately ignore this event. The author of an article that appeared in February 2003 in the English newspaper *The Hindu* deplores the way this tragedy is treated:

> Our children, then, must grow up not knowing that Gandhi was killed. That Gandhi was killed by a Hindu. That his killing, was, indeed part of a wider political current which resented Gandhi's acceptance of Muslims as part of the Indian nation. All this, because that political current has finally come into its own and taken hold of the reins of power in New Delhi. . . . Indeed, the moment of Gandhi's killing was not when he fell

to the assassin's bullet, but in the quiet closing of a chapter in which politics could be used to open up questions of what constitutes an ethical life, to the beginning of a new chapter when politics is only about theft and cheating.

(RoyChowdhury 2003 TH)

Hari Om, author of the section in question, replied in an article published a few days later in the same newspaper:

I would like to point out that this omission was not deliberate. My major problem was the time and space constraint. I had to write the history portion in less than eight months and cover a period of no less than 400 years in the 64-odd pages, which also include nearly 40 illustrations and

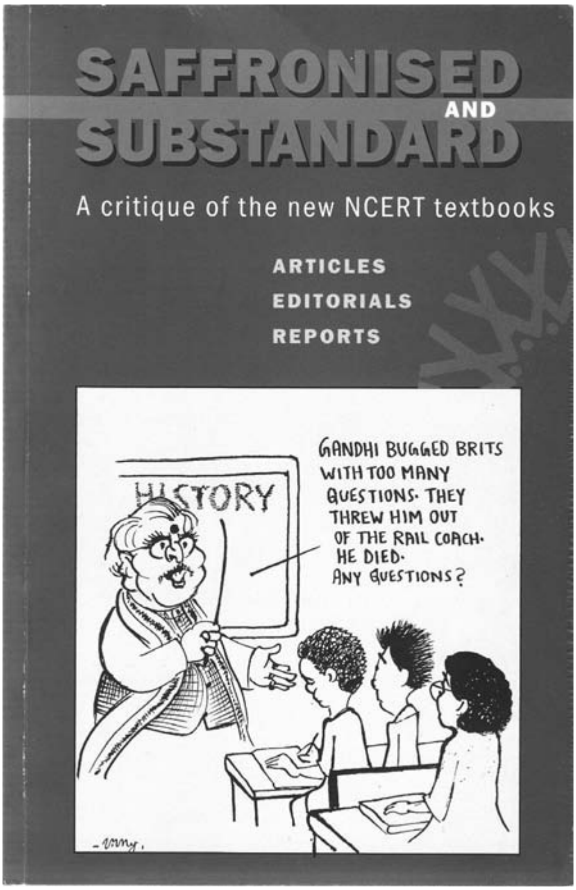


Figure 3.1 Cartoon of M.M. Joshi by E.P. Unny

Source: Copyright E.P. Unny and the Indian Express

> detailed exercises. It was impossible for me to include each and every development in the limited space available to me as one of the authors of 'Contemporary India'. Another problem was the font size. Since the textbook is meant for Class IX, the font size has to be bigger. This is the policy of NCERT and I had to go by it. What does all this further mean? It only means yet another limitation. But to advance these arguments, under no situation should it be taken to mean that I am in any way questioning Supriya RoyChowdhury's well-founded concern and anxiety.
>
> (Om 2003 TH)

However, the description of Gandhi's death was not much more detailed in the earlier textbooks. Krishna Kumar (1996) analyses the way the Class VIII textbook *Modern India* presented this event.[37] Kumar begins by quoting an extract from the textbook written by Arjun and Indira Dev. I reproduce its central section below:

> [Gandhiji] had devoted his life to the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. When the communal riots broke out, he toured the riot stricken areas with his message of love and brotherhood to restore peace and communal amity. Gandhiji was in a riot-affected area of Calcutta on the day India became independent. The killings of Hindus and Muslims and the partition of the country had caused him deep anguish. *His message of love and brotherhood was not to the liking of some people. Their minds had been poisoned by their hatred for other communities. On 30 January 1948, a Hindu fanatic shot him dead as he was going to a prayer meeting.* The Indian people who were just beginning to recover from the shock of the communal killings and destruction of the previous year were plunged into mourning.
>
> (Dev and Dev 1991: 270–1)

This passage does not give the readers enough information to make sense of the event (Kumar 1996: 8–19). If we concentrate on the three sentences in italics we understand that some people did not appreciate Gandhi's message of love and brotherhood. But no details are given on who were these people. The text makes it clear that their minds had been poisoned by hatred for *other* communities. The announcement in the next sentence of Gandhi's death at the hands of a Hindu fanatic leaves the reader without any explanation about the assassin's motives. For the reader to understand Gandhi's assassination, it would be necessary to mention the deep cracks that had appeared at the time between the Hindu and Muslim communities. But the authors of the textbook avoid this topic, giving the impression that they are glossing over aspects of events that make them uncomfortable (Kumar 1996: 14–15).

A reason for the discomfort in representing conflicts opposing Hindus and Muslims is certainly to be found in the secular perspective of the textbooks'

authors (see Chapter 2). It might also be linked with a more general desire to avoid the representation of social conflicts in textbooks. In textbooks, society is generally described as a largely cooperative system rather than one torn by conflict (see also Apple 2004: 86).[38]

Ideological distortions

The three historians who evaluated the NDA textbooks for the Indian History Congress feel that even though many errors were due to the authors' ignorance, others had to be attributed to their communalist vision of history (Habib *et al.* 2003: 3). Distortions linked with this vision can be grouped around three main themes: the glorification of the Vedic period as the only source of Indian civilization; the depreciation of anything having to do with Islam and the foreign status assigned to it; and the devaluation of communism. I will take up and develop each of these three aspects.

The glorification of the Vedic past consists of making the Vedic period the source of civilization and the cradle of all discoveries. The manual for teachers prepared in 2004 by the NCERT warns them about this tendency in the textbook on ancient India by Makkhan Lal: 'The book is marked by an over-glorification of certain aspects of the Indian past, especially those connected with the Vedic tradition and Hinduism. The Vedic people are given credit for various scientific discoveries actually made much later in time' (NCERT 2004: 15). The passage from the textbook to which this criticism refers reads as follows:

> Vedic people knew the methods of making squares equal in area to triangles, circles, and calculate the sums and differences of squares. The Zero was known in Rigvedic time itself and due to this, large numbers could also be recorded. Also the positional value of each number with its absolute value was known. Cubes, cuberoots, squareroots and underroots were also known and used.
>
> (Lal 2002: 100)

Suvira Jaiswal, Emeritus Professor of History, has reviewed the textbook *Ancient India* for Class XI in the *Report and Index of Errors*. She also commented on this passage:

> The entire statement is false and propagandist, made with a view to crediting the Vedas with all kinds of knowledge and scientific discoveries. No doubt, the zero and the positional value of numerals and decimal system were invented in India, and Aryabhata in the fifth century AD was familiar with the system of writing decimal numerals; but these discoveries were made some time in the early centuries of the Christian era. Positional value of numerals was not known to the engravers of the Maurya, Satavahana, Kushana and even Gupta inscriptions, which use

> different symbols for ten, twenty, thirty, hundred, two hundred and so on. Large numbers have nothing to do with the knowledge of zero.
>
> (Habib *et al*. 2003: 46)

Some passages from the book *India and the World* (Class VI) have also been criticized for their panegyric on the Vedic period. The *Upanishads* are described as 'the works of most profound philosophy in any religion' and a few pages later as 'the greatest works of philosophy in the history of humankind' (Lal *et al*. 2002: 91 and 134). Commenting on the first sentence, Irfan Habib contends that it represents the desire to instil the superiority of the Hindu religion in the minds of students (Habib *et al.* 2003: 14). Furthermore, the society in this period is described as egalitarian and meritocratic. There is, however, no reference to the status of women and the lower castes. The secularists reacted to this interpretation of ancient Indian history. They considered that it was a 'Brahmanical' approach in the sense that it failed to mention the injustices of the caste system and justified upper-caste domination by declaring that the caste system was based on merit.[39]

Moreover, this book stresses the exceptional continuity of the Indian and Chinese civilizations:

> You may be surprised to know that Indian and Chinese civilizations are the only ones which have survived right from the time they came into existence till date. They have retained many of their basic and distinguishing characteristic features which link them with the past. All other early civilizations have disappeared and the present people/civilizations have no connection with past ones.
>
> (Lal *et al*. 2002: 58)[40]

The insistence on the deep roots of Indian civilization and the direct link between present and ancient practices constitutes a central theme of the rewriting of history textbooks. The reader's attention is drawn to the continuity of traditions from Vedic times to the present. The Vedic period is presented as the ancient and glorious source of Indian civilization.

These statements are linked with the debate on the origin of the Vedic people, the Indo-Aryans.[41] The term Indo-Aryan was first used in the twentieth century to denote languages with similar features. The idea that Sanskrit, Greek and Latin share a common origin was developed on the basis of the research conducted by William Jones (1746–94) who did not, however, use this term in his theory on the monogenesis of languages. Soon after the appearance of the term Aryan, a semantic and conceptual shift occurred, which resulted in the association of language with race: the people sharing the Indo-Aryan languages became a race, the 'Aryan race'. Similarly, people speaking Dravidian languages were imagined as a 'Dravidian race' (Thapar 1999b: 15–17).

Once the linguistic categories became equated with racial groups, the question that arose was to which of the two 'races' the original inhabitants of India belonged. To answer this question, defenders of Dalit rights introduced a third variable in the debate, caste. Jyotiba Phule (1827–90) presumed that the original inhabitants of India were the Adivasis (among whom he included the lower castes from the Shudras to the untouchables). These indigenous peoples were supposed to have fought and lost against the Aryan invaders (which Phule equates with the Brahmins). In this view, the Brahmins have invented castes to maintain the Shudras in a state of submission (Thapar 1999b: 18). According to this theory, the Brahmins were not the first inhabitants of the Indian territories but they were outsiders. National power, Phule said, should belong to the original inhabitants or the low castes. The Hindu nationalists responded by advancing a different interpretation stressing the indigenous origin of the Indo-Aryans. Notably, Golwalkar added one part to Tilak's argument according to which the Aryans were originally from the North Pole. He added that the North Pole 'is not stationary' and was long ago situated in what is today Bihar and Orissa. Thus, 'it was not the Hindus who migrated to that land but the Arctic Zone which emigrated and left the Hindus in Hindusthan'. Golwalkar continues and says that whatever are the hypotheses, what is certain is that 'Hindus come into this land from nowhere, but are indigenous children of the soil, always from times immemorial and are natural masters of the country' (Golwalkar 1947: 12–13).

The approach presented in the old textbooks about the question of the Aryan origin is the well-established 'Aryan migration theory'. It states that the Indo-Aryans came to India a little before 1500BC as a result of migrations from Central Asia and that they succeeded to the Harappan civilization.[42] In contrast, the NDA textbooks suggest that the opposite version (according to which the Indo-Aryans were the original inhabitants of India) is more plausible. Makkhan Lal mentions the theory of migrations in his textbook on ancient India but insists that it is based on conjecture. He maintains that the argument about the indigenousness of the Aryans is the one most probable according to the results of the scientific research conducted so far (Lal 2002: 88–9).

Lal continues along the same reasoning and affirms that even though scientists have for a long time made a distinction between the Harappan (or Indus Valley) and the Vedic cultures, the research conducted during the last 50 years leads towards different conclusions. The two civilizations, he claims, are but one (Lal 2002: 89). This highly contested assertion makes it possible to confer on the Aryans the status of India's original inhabitants, a status that cannot be attributed to them if it is admitted that they were preceded by the Harappan civilization, which Hindu nationalists renamed the Indus-Saraswati civilization (Lal *et al.* 2002: 80). The use of this nomenclature suggests that the civilization that flourished in the Indus valley between 2600 and 1800BC was an Indo-Aryan civilization (Habib *et al.* 2003: 9).

The question of indigenousness is fundamental for the Hindu nationalists as they base their 'right' to define the Indian nation as a Hindu nation on this

characteristic of their ancestors.[43] They assert that today Hindus are the descendants of the Indo-Aryans, the first inhabitants of India. In this respect, they claim to have more right to the territory than the Muslim or Christian Indians who are descendants of outsiders. However, if they were to accept that the Indo-Aryans migrated to India, it would make them descendants of foreigners just like the Muslims and Christians and they would lose their right of primogeniture. In this case, there would be no justification for the Hindu character of the Indian nation.[44]

The second theme around which the communalist view is crystallized is *the representation of Muslims as enemies and invaders*, whether during the medieval period or in modern times. According to critics, in her book *Medieval India* Meenakshi Jain insists in an exaggerated and unjustified manner on the oppressive nature of the 'Muslims invaders' by giving too many details about the iniquitous taxes imposed on Hindus. She writes for example that '[t]he rate of taxation in pre-Islamic India was usually one-sixth of the produce and appears to have been far less than the exactions under the Delhi Sultans' (Jain 2002: 75, see also pp. 154–5). This claim has been contested by Suvira Jaiswal who judged that this is 'a characteristic piece of attributing ideal conditions to ancient India and presenting medieval India in dark colours. No serious historian supposes the burden of taxation to have been just one-sixth of the produce in "pre-Islamic" times' (Habib *et al.* 2003: 65).[45]

The opponents to the NDA textbooks emphasized that these books' narratives belittle the medieval period as a dark age of cultural regression, despotism and political brutality after a Vedic golden age. Vishwa Mohan Jha (2003: 63–5) illustrates this by comparing the descriptions of Indian society during the 'Hindu' and the 'Muslim' periods in *India and the World* for Class VII (Yadav *et al.* 2003). The following extract describes conditions in North India between AD700 and 1200:

> In the previous class we have read that the society was comprised of four varnas. These varnas were further subdivided into several jatis.
>
> The law givers of this period followed the earlier marriage rules. Remarriage was also permitted during this period. Women had the right to inherit property. After coming into Muslim contact there began the purdah system. The practice of sati became more prevalent to save themselves from falling into the hands of invaders.
>
> There was no significant change in the pattern of living. Sculptures depict various types of dresses and ornaments. People followed different types of social activities such as fairs, festivals and pilgrimages to sacred places and centres.
>
> (Yadav *et al.* 2003: 99)

A few lines later, there is a description of the conditions prevailing in South India during the same period:

> The Brahmans enjoyed the good will of kings and respect of people because of their high moral character and learning. The traders and artisans commanded greater esteem in society than the officials of the state. Different sections of society joined together for common purposes. The cooperation among the people was visible in the functioning of different village assemblies. Women were held in great honour and enjoyed freedom. They were imparted education in various branches of learning and fine arts.
>
> (Yadav *et al.* 2003: 110)

Then there is a description of the conditions under the Delhi Sultanate:

> The society consisted mainly of Muslim and Hindu population. The Muslims formed the ruling class who belonged to Sunni and Shia sects. Majority of them belonged to foreign countries. Ibn Battutah praises hospitality of the Hindus and says that the caste rules were strictly followed in marriages. The freedom of women was much restricted. Purdah became common in the society. There were also a large number of slaves in the services of Delhi Sultans. In this regard the record of Firoz Shah Tughlaq is notable. He had in his pay-rolls about 1,80,000 slaves.
>
> (Yadav *et al.* 2003: 122)

And, finally, the conditions under the Mughal Empire:

> The general nature of the society continued as before. The Mughal nobility along with landlords formed the upper section of society. These were mainly Turanis, Iranis, Afghans, Shaikzadas and a few Rajputs. They received high salaries but their habits were also extravagant and they lived a life of great pomp and luxury.
>
> (Yadav *et al.* 2003: 142)

These extracts portray in negative terms the consequences of the advent of Islam in India and generally everything related to this religion. In addition, they paint the medieval period as a time during which there were two opposing homogeneous groups – one Hindu and the other Muslim. The booklet brought out by the NCERT to guide teachers makes the following observation about the above quoted textbook (*India and the World* for Class VII): 'The textbook reduces the socio-religious diversities in medieval India into two homogeneous categories: the "Hindus" and the "Muslims". This is a serious misrepresentation of this period of Indian history' (NCERT 2004: 9). A similar problem is pointed out for the book *Medieval India*: 'There is practically no positive religious and cultural interaction shown between the categories defined as "Muslims" and "Hindus". Consequently, the assimilative aspects of medieval Indian culture – art forms, literature, Sufi-Bhakti interaction – are totally missing' (NCERT 2004: 16).

The NDA textbooks also depict negatively the role of Muslims in Modern Indian history making them responsible for Partition. The book *Contemporary India* (Class IX) reports the claims and arguments of the Muslim League and emphasizes its communalist position without any mention whatsoever of the Hindu communalism championed by movements such as the *Hindu Mahasabha* and the RSS. Furthermore, the role played by Muslims in the independence movement is glossed over, giving the impression that all Muslims were in favour of Partition. 'The new NCERT textbook . . . makes no attempt to bring out the common element of anti-colonialism among the various sections of the Indian people. On the contrary, it succeeds in conveying an impression that freedom was obtained despite the presence of Dalits, Christians, Communists, and, above all, Muslims' (Jha 2003b FL).

The third systematic bias to be found in the NDA textbooks' narrative concerns the *denigration of communism* (Rajalakshmi 2003a FL). For instance, the textbook *India and the World* (Class VIII) was singled out as betraying 'an ideological slant' because '[t]here is no explanation of the concept of socialism. The non-participation of the Communist party during the 1942 Movement is highlighted, ignoring the non-participation of the Hindu Mahasabha' (NCERT 2004: 14). The textbook for Class IX, *Contemporary India*, was criticized for the same reasons (see Habib *et al*. 2003). In this book, the non-participation of the Communists (and the Muslim League) in the Quit India Movement is mentioned (Om *et al.* 2003: 54), whereas the absence of the RSS and the *Hindu Mahasabha* is not. Besides, the Russian Revolution is described as a coup d'état, which, according to Irfan Habib, 'should suit a very cheap Right-wing propaganda sheet rather than a school textbook' (Habib *et al.* 2003: 88).

The return of the Congress and 'desaffronization' of education

The 14th general election was held in April and May 2004. According to forecasts, the BJP was expected to win. However, against all expectations, the Congress managed to gather a majority in Parliament thanks to the external support (without participation in the government) from the communist parties (Jaffrelot 2005b). The UPA, the coalition led by the Congress, controlled 221 of the 543 seats in the Lower House of Parliament. The number of seats held directly by the Congress rose from 112 to 145. The BJP and its allies in the NDA controlled 183 seats (of which the BJP had won 139 as compared to 182 in 1998 and 1999). The Congress accounted for 26.69 per cent of the votes polled and the BJP 22.16 per cent.

During its election campaign, the Congress announced that it would take up the desaffronization of education once it came to power. After its election, the party appointed Arjun Singh as minister of human resource development, a portfolio he had already held from 1991 to 1994 in P.V. Narasimha Rao's cabinet. Arjun Singh was a senior member of the Congress. He joined the party in 1960 and became chief minister of Madhya Pradesh in 1980, then governor

of Punjab in 1984. A year later, he returned to the Union government as commerce minister when Rajiv Gandhi was prime minister. A member of the *Rajya Sabha*, the Upper House of Parliament, Singh seems nevertheless to have lost his popular base as attested by his successive defeats in the *Lok Sabha* elections in 1996, 1998 and 1999.

Once he became HRD minister, Arjun Singh began by evaluating the changes introduced by the NDA. He declared that he was willing to rectify the mistakes, but without acting in haste. Three areas seemed problematic: the appointments made by the previous government, the curriculum (as well as the syllabi) and the school textbooks introduced between 2002 and 2004. Regarding the first point, a part of the Left considered that the changes were not fast enough (Rajalakshmi 2004 FL), while the Hindu nationalists denounced the witch-hunt launched by the new government (Joshi 2005 Org.). Most of the persons heading institutions in charge of culture and education were replaced by Congress sympathizers (Bamzai 2004 ITI).[46] J.S. Rajput resigned from the post of director of NCERT before the end of his term and Krishna Kumar who was then professor in the Department of Education of Delhi University was appointed in his place.

Regarding the curriculum and the textbooks, Arjun Singh asked for an in-depth review to be undertaken (Kaur 2004 FL). In June 2004, the NCERT set up a commission to evaluate the textbooks published during the BJP-led government. Three history professors were selected.[47] The report they submitted put forth that the textbooks contained a large number of printing mistakes, were of a poor quality and biased ‘in favour of one interpretation of the Hindu religion that challenges the coexistence over time of varied currents in India’s historical unity in diversity’ (GoI 2004). They consequently recommended that these books should not be used for teaching. They also felt that it was not advisable to continue to use them (this is, however, what the ministry did until the third set of textbooks was ready) given that the authors’ ideology had influenced the general treatment of some topics. Hence, the correction of these books would have required fully rewriting some parts.

The committee set up for evaluating the NDA textbooks did not, however, recommend the reintroduction of the old textbooks.[48] S. Settar, a member of this committee, cited several reasons to justify this decision: first, the textbooks written for Classes VI to X no longer corresponded to the curriculum as history had become a part of the course on social science. Second, some of the old textbooks were no longer available (they had been out of print for a long time). Third, these textbooks were written 30 years ago and called for major revisions, for which there was not enough time (Menon 2004 FL). The decision not to reintroduce the old textbooks surprised many observers and met with the Left’s disapproval as it had expected that the withdrawal of the NDA textbooks would be one of the first steps taken by the UPA. SAHMAT and the Delhi Historians Group demanded that the government reintroduce the first set of history textbooks immediately. On 11 June 2004, SAHMAT held a convention against communalization of education similar to the one

organized when the BJP came to power in 1998. A declaration adopted by the convention's participants called for the immediate withdrawal of the 2000 curriculum and the NDA textbooks, particularly the social sciences and history ones, and their replacement by the 1988 curriculum and the old textbooks (People's Democracy 2004). As for the Delhi Historians Group, it demanded that

> as an immediate first step, the textbooks replaced by the NCERT must be brought back forthwith and reprinted so that students starting school after the vacation are not forced to read the dangerous trash now circulated . . . in short, the secular formations must now take on the communal challenge on a war footing.
>
> (Rajalakshmi 2004 FL)

Despite this mobilization, Arjun Singh decided that the NDA textbooks would continue to be used till the end of the school year 2004–5, to avoid upsetting students by changing textbooks in the middle of the year. The old textbooks were, however, reprinted and a few copies were sent to each school affiliated to the CBSE to be used as reference material. In July 2004, the government asked the NCERT to begin work on the revision of the curriculum. The reconstituted CABE approved the new curriculum in September 2005. The NCERT introduced the first 'third generation' history textbooks for the school year 2006–7.

The ministers of the BJP-governed states announced that they would not follow the new curriculum and textbooks.[49] The former HRD minister, M.M. Joshi, accused the UPA of 'raping' the education system:

> The UPA government under unwanted influence of left parties wants to bring back the textbooks which depicted distorted facts like describing great Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur as 'lootera', Jats as 'dacoits' and nationalist heroes like Bhagat Singh, Chandra Sekhar Azad and Khudi Ram Bose as 'terrorists'. This is nothing but rape of our education system.
>
> (Joshi cited in *Outlook* 2004)

When the journalists to whom Joshi was talking pointed out that the use of the word 'rape' in this context was inappropriate, he retorted that 'this word was apt to describe the UPA government's sinister design to dish out distorted and factually incorrect version of the country's history and its heroes to our children'. Joshi added that he regretted the fact that the Left parties and the Congress opposed the BJP when it tried to correct the erroneous version of history that had been taught to the young generation for more than 50 years (*Outlook* 2004).

The Hindu nationalists criticized the reforms in education introduced by the UPA by resorting to the same kind of arguments used by the secularists when the NDA was in power. For the secularists, the enemy is communalist and

saffron. For the *Sangh Parivar*, after the Congress's return to power, the enemy is communist and red. An editorial in the *Organiser*, the weekly of the RSS, denounced the intentions of the 2005 curriculum in the following words:

> It is clear that the indecent haste for introducing the new NCF [National Curriculum framework] is the pressure from the communists. The comrades and their fellow travellers are in a hurry to paint the Indian education red. . . . The textbooks introduced by the UPA and written by fellow comrades are complete with factual errors and ideological bias. . . . It [the NCF] offers no scope for widening the inquisitive creativity, questioning faculty and curiosity of the young mind.
>
> (Org. 2005)

As could be expected, the change of curriculum and textbooks gave rise to protests from the Hindu nationalist movement. Yet, the opposition from the Left parties and even from the same historians who had joined the campaign against the saffronization of education was more unexpected. However, *The Telegraph* reported in its 7 August 2005 issue that '[h]istorians like Irfan Habib, Bipan Chandra and Arjun Dev today launched a campaign against NCERT director Krishna Kumar and his team of experts at a day-long seminar, saying they will not allow the framework to be adopted'. The detractors of the 2005 curriculum believed that this document did not emphasize enough the importance of secularism and the development of the scientific spirit. Some also felt that the document tried to minimize the communalist attacks against education launched by the previous government by concentrating on the reform related to reducing the burden of education (Sharma 2005 *People's Democracy*).

The organization SAHMAT published a collection of articles in August 2005 entitled *Debating Education*. The authors of these articles were particularly virulent about the National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF 2005). They demanded that it be rejected and a new project prepared in its place. Their major worry was that the NCF did not mention that religion should be excluded from school education. Irfan Habib affirmed that the new document encouraged the propagation of obscurantism by not making the fight against communalism its main concern. Habib blamed the document for giving primacy to the child's individual development whereas this exercise should be shaped by the needs of nation-building and the supremacy of rationality (Habib quoted in Sethi 2005 IE).

The desire expressed in the 2005 curriculum to give more importance to local knowledge and to use texts derived from different sources in order to represent the country's diversity was seen by the Left as a dangerous and regressive tendency: 'In any case a grave danger lurks behind the glorification of primitive beliefs contrasted to scientific concepts, and in indulging in it one would open the gates to all kinds of superstition infiltrating school education' (SAHMAT, 2005, 'Debating Education', quoted in Sethi 2005 IE). According

to one section of the Left, the 2005 curriculum was on the wrong track and moving away from its duty, which they conceived as being secular, rational and national (Sethi 2005 IE).

In 2005–6, the old textbooks were republished with a few modifications in the passages that had been censored in 2001. They were used as alternative teaching material while their substitutes were being written. The *Sangh Parivar* once again took up its fight against the 'offending' content of the old textbooks. A new organization, the *Shiksha Bachao Andolan Samiti* (SBAS – Movement for Saving Education) set up by *Vidya Bharati* after the NDA lost the elections in 2004, denounced the reforms introduced in the field of education by the Congress-led alliance. It also filed several petitions, among others one in the Delhi High Court and another in a lower court in Alwar. The petitions concerned the removal of some passages in the old textbooks. The civil court in Alwar decided in SBAS's favour. It asked the NCERT to remove the objectionable sections and to be careful that the new textbooks did not contain such elements. The Delhi High Court's decision was also favourable to the SBAS's demand: on 30 January 2008, it decided that the 75 incriminated passages had to be deleted from the textbooks for the next academic year (Kumar 2008a Org.). The majority of the passages referred to consumption of beef in ancient India and to the origin of the Aryans. There was also one allusion to Maharaja Ranjit Singh who was said, in the textbook, to have used his long grey beard to clean the dust from the bodies of Muslim beggars (see Org. 2006). These were the same topics and partly the same passages that had been singled out for criticism by the Hindu nationalist movement in 1977 and in 2001.

The UPA textbooks were introduced in 2006 and 2007. Protest was directed this time towards the social sciences textbook for Class XII and the Hindi textbook for Class XI. The content of the first provoked a general disquiet among political parties even before it came out. This was caused by the inclusion of references to sensitive events of the post-independence period (the Emergency, the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, the *Babri Masjid* demolition and the Gujarat riots). As for the Hindi textbook, it was reproached for including stories by Prem Chand and Om Prakash Valmiki that contained derogatory references to Dalits. The reply to this criticism was that this allowed the subject of the caste system to be discussed in class. Moreover, the book makes clear that the language used by these authors is no longer acceptable (EPW 2006). Some further objections have been raised by the BJP concerning, among other things, the presentation in the textbook of the painter M.F. Hussain. Moreover, the BJP protested to the inclusion of a poem by the Punjabi writer Avtaar Singh, also called 'Paash'. The BJP spokesperson brought up this issue in the *Rajya Sabha* alleging that this poet was a Naxalite and that including his work was synonymous with glorifying naxalism (Sinha 2006 IE).[50]

However, with regard to the history textbooks, they were in general well received. They were praised for their good quality, innovative content, choice and layout of illustrations and for their non-partisan presentation of history (even if this was criticized by the Left).

Indian history in California

As the Indian controversy was calming down, another one began in California. This state reviews its textbooks every six years and on these occasions allows the public to suggest corrections in the future textbooks' content. In April 2005 the adoption process for the new history and social sciences textbooks began. In early September, the Hindu Education Foundation (HEF), linked with the *Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh* (the US counterpart of the RSS), and the Vedic Foundation (VF) of Austin, Texas, close to the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* of America, proposed more than 150 modifications for the sixth grade textbooks (Chatterji 2006 *Dissident Voice*).[51] After receiving the proposed edits from the HEF and VF, the Curriculum Commission appointed an ad hoc committee to review the suggestions. The Committee and its advisor Shiv Bajpai (Emeritus Professor in History, California State University, Northridge) approved most of the edits. Yet, it came out later that Dr Bajpai had been recommended by the VF as an independent scholar even though he was a member of the World Association for Vedic Studies, an organization linked with the VF and HEF. However, the Curriculum Commission submitted the recommendations to the State Board and the process was nearly over. Everything was going smoothly.

The dispute began in November 2005 when Michael Witzel, Wales Professor of Sanskrit at Harvard University, heard of the proposed changes and wrote to the Board that they were 'unscholarly [and] politically and religiously motivated' (quoted in Golden 2006 *Wall Street Journal*). The letter was co-signed by nearly 50 other scholars and this position was subsequently supported by over 140 academicians. After receiving Professor Witzel's letter, the Board invited him with two other professors (James Heitzman from UC Davis and Stanley Wolpert from UCLA) to scrutinize Dr Bajpai's recommendations. The three-member review panel agreed that a few passages were prejudiced and/or offensive and ought to be dropped but it opposed most of the proposed edits.

During this period, Michael Witzel received insulting e-mails and death threats. An e-petition was also addressed to Harvard University asking it to 'end its association with Aryan Supremacist/Creationist hate-mongering activities' (Gupta 2005). This was not the first time that Professor Witzel was crossing swords with Hindu nationalism. He had previously refuted Dr N.S. Rajaram's claim of having deciphered the Indus Valley inscriptions (see p. 112).

In the proposed Californian textbooks, four subjects were particularly controversial (see Chatterji 2006 *Dissident Voice* and Lal 2006 *Outlook*). They pertained to the role of women in ancient India, the origin of the Aryans, the caste system and the presentation of Hinduism. On the first point, the HEF and VF wanted the sentence 'Men had many more rights than women' to be removed. They proposed to write instead: 'Men had different duties (*dharma*) as well as rights than women. Many women were among the sages to whom the Vedas were revealed'. On the origin of the Aryans, the HEF and VF

questioned the narrative of Aryan migration in India as it was presented in the textbook. On the caste system, the HEF thought the sentence 'The Aryans created a caste system', should be replaced with 'During Vedic times, people were divided into different social groups (varnas) based on their capacity to undertake a particular profession'. This sentence inferred that caste is not hereditary but based on 'capacity'. This edit and others proposed by the HEF made caste just another form of social stratification, similar to class distinction. Moreover, one modification required the removal of the word 'Dalit' that appeared in one sentence arguing that it was 'irrelevant'. Regarding Hinduism, the proposed rewrites painted it as a monolithic and monotheistic religion 'marginalizing the multiple female and male deities that Hindus throughout India worship'. There is a certain tension here as:

> [m]any of the VF/HEF edits sought to emphasize a Vedic form of Hinduism, which contains a religious justification for the caste system, while at the same time attempting to de-link Hinduism from the caste system and then minimizing or eliminating mention of the effects of caste discrimination upon lower caste and dalit communities.
>
> (Visweswaran *et al.* 2009: 107)

Mobilization for and against the edits increased and there were several more rounds of consultations. Many anti-communalist, pro-secular and Dalit groups mobilized against the proposed changes.[52] The HEF and VF defended their position arguing that the negative light under which Hinduism was presented humiliated Hindu children. Moreover, they added that this defamatory treatment was applied only to Hinduism. According to this view, the textbooks 'deal with Abrahamic religions from an insider's perspective, whereas Hinduism is treated often from a hostile outsider's perspective' (Agarwal 2005–6: 9).[53]

Finally, in March 2006, the State Board of Education adopted a revised set of recommendations in which many suggestions of the HEF and VF were not included. Yet, the dispute was not over, as the Hindu American Foundation (a group with links to both the VF and HEF) decided to sue the Board against the publication of the new books. The Superior Court of California dismissed claims that the textbooks contained anti-Hindu bias even if the judge found the approval process for all state textbooks invalid (Burress 2006 *SF Chronicle*). In spring 2006, another case was launched in the California Federal Court by the *Hindutva*-affiliated organization California Parents for Equalization of Educational Materials (CAPEEM). The case was settled only in June 2009 after three years of legal battle. CAPEEM lost except for one demand, which was settled out of court with the State Board of Education (for a detailed analysis see Rajagopal 2009).

Christian, Jewish and Muslim groups had long been participating in the California Department of Education's textbook revision process, but it was the first time that Hindu groups stepped into the fray. California is one of the

21 states in the United States that follow a textbook adoption process, in which a textbook committee or the state education department review textbooks that schools may then purchase with public money. In the other states, districts can purchase the textbooks they choose. States with adoption process – and especially the huge adoption states of California and Texas – regulate the textbooks' content nationwide as textbook publishers follow their requirements and sell the textbooks in the 'open' states as well (Fordham Institute 2004).

The Californian controversy draws attention to the presence and strength of Hindu nationalism outside India. However, the 'diaspora Hindutva movement' plays a role in India as well if only because of its very substantial financial support to the *Sangh Parivar*'s activities (Bhatt and Mukta 2000). The *Sangh Parivar* organizations abroad make appeals for diaspora contributions but the *Hindutva* activities have also benefited from donations of people not linked with the movement giving money for development work in India without being aware of the ideological affiliations of these organizations. In 2002, a report on the NGO *India Development and Relief Fund* (IDRF) exposed the nexus between funding of charities in the West and the expansion of communal networks of the *Sangh Parivar* in India (Sabrang 2002). The IDRF presented itself to donors as a non-profit charitable organization collecting funds in the US for development projects in India. Yet, the report showed that many of the associations receiving money by the intermediary of the IDRF belonged to the *Sangh Parivar*. One of these organizations was *Ekal Vidyalaya* (see Chapter 5).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that since their introduction, the *Sangh Parivar* has tried to modify the NCERT history textbooks containing the secular representation of history. The subjects they wanted to alter remained the same over time. The repeated attempts to modify history textbooks as well as the implications of the *Sangh Parivar* in the field of education demonstrate the central concern education in general, and history in particular, represent in the *Sangh Parivar*'s ideology. The centrality of history comes from the fact that its entire discourse rests on a certain representation of Indian history. Moreover, history is seen as an essential instrument to revitalize and regenerate the nation. In this view, it is from the knowledge of their glorious past that Indians will draw their pride.

With the defeat of the BJP at the Centre in 2004, several of the changes it introduced in education were no longer pursued. This is what happened with the textbooks as new books were prepared. However, the *Sangh Parivar*'s version of history is still taught in the *Vidya Bharati* schools and in its other educational projects as well as in some states governed by the BJP, notably in Gujarat.

The State of Gujarat, with a BJP government, implemented the education reforms proposed by the NCERT in 2000. The education department adapted

the Gujarat curriculum and syllabus according to the new NCERT documents and the *State Board of School Textbooks* prepared new books for some subjects. In 2005, the *Gujarat Board* introduced a new social sciences textbook for Class IX. This textbook attracted national and international attention because it presented Nazism in a positive manner and did not mention the Holocaust.[54] Several observers considered that this choice was due to the admiration the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, had for Nazism, whereas the official explanation was that these two paragraphs exposed the way the partisans of Nazism perceived themselves (ToI 2005a). It is only after the visit of the General Consul of Israel in Gujarat in October 2005 that the government decided to withdraw the incriminated pages from the syllabus (ToI 2005b).[55]

To conclude this chapter, I would like to reiterate a point I have already mentioned: historical narratives with communalist tints are widespread and were present in some textbooks before the BJP came to power. In Ahmedabad, during the summer of 2005 I interviewed a teacher from a private school. She had been teaching for the last 20 years with the Gujarat State Board textbooks. About the new social science textbook for Class IX, she said: ‘The BJP did not change a lot, it is just worse’. She insisted on the fact that the old textbooks already contained lots of errors and a partial presentation of certain events.

4 Enemies and defenders

Writing Indian history: a struggle for influence

Historiography and power

In the same spirit as Michael W. Apple and Kristen L. Buras in *The Subaltern Speak* (2006), I adopt here a mainly synchronic approach. I will compare the positions of different groups at a particular time and on the same subject in order to 'illustrate the complexities of contests among differentially empowered groups to influence the construction of knowledge and appropriation of resources in the arena of education' (Buras and Apple 2006: 3). Generally speaking, a party in power is in a position to appropriate resources in the field of education. It can play a decisive part in the construction of knowledge by influencing research through the allocation of funds and through the appointment of persons of its choice in the academic field. It is nevertheless probable that such a hegemonic position would lead to the formation of an opposition. The conflict opposing secular and Hindu nationalist historians is an example of such a process.

Intellectuals are involved in nation-building as actors. They are an active force formulating aspects of national identity by selecting within the large universe of discursive materials available (cf. building blocks, Chapter 1). They assemble disparate cultural and historical elements and silence the parts that seem incoherent with the narrative or just unheroic (Kennedy and Suny 1999: 2).[1] This focus on the role of intellectuals does not, however, amount to limiting nationalism to an instrumentalist practice whose actions are likely to be determined by the interests of the elite. 'Interests' undoubtedly play a central part in the actions of the elites yet 'interests' are themselves culturally and historically constructed, which leads Kennedy and Suny (1999: 4) to add that '[i]t is not that nationalism is not "useful" or "rational" in certain circumstances, but that it is also much more than useful and rational; it is also irrational, excessive, even self-destructive'.

In India, two groups competed with each other to dominate historiography and to appropriate resources in the field of education and historical research. The ideological and historiographical polarization that I am studying existed before the 1998–2004 episode of the textbook controversy. The two camps

were similar to those opposed to each other in 1977 after the attempt to censor some history textbooks as well as to those involved in the *Babri Masjid* controversy. The actors may not be exactly the same, but their opposing conceptions of history do not change. One camp represented the version of history associated with Left-wing historians, nationalist and secular, while the other camp supported the Hindu nationalist or communalist version of the Indian past. In 1998, the secularists partially lost their predominance to the Hindu nationalists. Changes were introduced in the teaching of history. Consequently, dissensions crystallized with one group supporting the changes and the other opposing them.

The secular nationalist group consisted of historians who had written the first set of textbooks: Romila Thapar, Satish Chandra, R.S. Sharma, Bipan Chandra and Arjun Dev. These authors could be described as Left-leaning or as secular nationalists influenced by a Marxist approach to history. Yet, regarding their political affiliation, '[m]ost NCERT authors, who use Marxism in their professional careers, have been too personally individualistic to be bound or even limited by it' (Hoffmann 2001: 98). Other historians (among others Irfan Habib, K.N. Panikkar and A.G. Noorani), who did not take part in the writing of textbooks, have also been very critical of the reforms implemented by the BJP. All these scholars belong to the wider circle of intellectuals who support secularism. In addition, a number of NGOs were also involved, notably SAHMAT and *Communalism Combat*.

The opposite camp consisted of the writers of the new textbooks but not all of them were similarly vocal. While Makkhan Lal and Meenakshi Jain participated directly in the controversy, Satish Chandra Mittal and Hari Om were involved in it to a lesser extent. This group also included persons who were appointed to key posts in institutions in charge of education between 1998 and 2004 and who supported the reforms (particularly M.M. Joshi and J.S. Rajput). Moreover, scholars favourable to Hindu nationalism (Arun Shourie, B.B. Lal, S.P. Gupta and Devendra Swaroop) played an important role by their writings and interventions in the media. Some members of the Indian diaspora did not directly participate in the 'textbook war' but stirred the historiographical debate through their publications, particularly those on the origin of the Indo-Aryans.[2] This is also true of a small number of European and American intellectuals sympathetic to the *Sangh Parivar* (notably Koenraad Elst, David Frawley and François Gautier).[3]

In 2000, when the NCERT announced the replacement of the history textbooks, it did not initially disclose the names of the historians selected to write the new books. Once the names became known, numerous observers commented on their common ideological affiliation and their lack of academic credibility (Joshi 2002 HT). The authors of the NDA textbooks were all sympathizers of the *Sangh Parivar* and some of them had been directly involved in the campaign for the 'liberation of the Ram temple' in Ayodhya. This is true of the authors of the textbook on ancient India for Class IX, T.P. Verma and M. Lal (Mody 2001a TH).

Each camp got political support from the party it was allied with. The supporters of *Hindutva* history belonged to the cluster of groups revolving around the RSS. Because of this they benefitted from the support of the various groups within the movement. As for the secular historians, they were supported by the Congress Party as well as the Communist Party of India (Marxist) – (CPI (M)).[4] The latter vehemently opposed the reforms. It regularly published articles on this topic in its weekly, *People's Democracy*. The Students' Federation of India (SFI) affiliated to the CPI(M) also published two collections of articles denouncing 'communalisation of education' (SFI s.d. and SFI 2000).

Between 1998 and 2004, the secular authors were ousted, but they had been predominant in the academic field since the late 1960s. As for the scholars of the 'secular community', they had ruled over the domain of history since Nehru's time. They determined:

- the teaching of history in schools as they wrote the textbooks;
- the teaching and production of history within the academic field as they occupied senior positions in the history departments of the most reputed Indian universities, particularly Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in Delhi;[5]
- the areas of research through their membership in academic associations such as the Indian Council of Historical Research and the Indian History Congress.

Ashis Nandy believes that their control and monopoly over the field of history increased during the 1970s when Indira Gandhi was prime minister and Nurul Hasan (who was a Leninist) was education minister. According to Nandy, Hasan imposed 'the beauties of historical materialism and objective truths of history' on Indian intellectuals. The system and the regulations established during this period allowed the government of the Union to exert a hold on the education system. However, once this instrument was in place, it could as well help implement a different vision. This is what happened in 1998: the BJP used the system to impose its view of history and the centralization made it easier for the Hindu nationalists to introduce changes and diffuse them rapidly (Nandy 2004 ToI). Following this appropriation, observers realized the power (either positive or negative) and the potential danger of such a centralized system (see in particular Kumar 2002).

Having lost their privileges, the secularists tried to regain their earlier position. The struggle for personal influence among the various protagonists was a non-negligible component of the debate and participated in stoking it. The authors of the old textbooks were not ready to give up their privileged position. What Romila Thapar said following the Congress's return to power in 2004 is significant in this respect: 'Discussions among those who authored *the original textbooks*, those who are proposing to write new ones together with a few other historians and schoolteachers are in any case a necessary procedure' (Thapar 2005 TH, emphasis added). She sees it as necessary to

include in the revision process the authors of the old textbooks that she calls the 'original textbooks'. It was, however, quite conceivable and even defendable to stop using the old textbooks and replace the NDA ones deemed unusable by the Congress with new books written by other authors (and this is what the NCERT did in 2005). Thapar seems to imply that the old textbooks had acquired the aura of immutable reference works. There could be changes, but they should remain within the framework constituted by the old textbooks.

Thapar is also not in favour of NCF's proposal to introduce flexibility and plurality in the choice of textbooks. This document recommends that instead of having just one series of textbooks, several books on the same subject should be made available. Thapar finds this openness dangerous for good-quality teaching.

> Some teach good quality history; others have replaced history by fantasy, with pernicious implications. If all these books claiming to be textbooks are currently prescribed, then who is to judge the legitimacy of these books, specifically as textbooks? Clearly, this needs a rational answer. . . . But books that claim to be textbooks, irrespective of who publishes them, if they are treated as reliable in the knowledge they convey, must be vetted by a committee of professional scholars in the particular subject and such as are respected by their peer group. Such a committee would be responsible to the public and to the educational system for clearing the disciplinary content of textbooks. Otherwise, textbooks will become like the internet where anything goes.
>
> (Thapar 2005 TH)

The secular historians were not ready to give up their control over the writing of history, especially since they believed that their competitors were not only mediocre scholars but also purveyors of a dangerous ideology. This competition for influence on the construction of knowledge in general, and historical knowledge in particular, is linked with the struggle for defining national identity. As a matter of fact, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the representation of history is perceived as an essential element for building this identity. The Hindu nationalists were attacked not only because they raised the spectre of communal violence but also because they tried to snatch the agenda of nation-building from the hands of its traditional guardians (Srivastava 1998: 6).

A third group of scholars participated in the controversy but indirectly, through the indictment of their arguments. These authors can be grouped within a loosely defined postmodern/postcolonial framework. Incriminated are mainly Ashis Nandy and the other anti-secularists, particularly T.N. Madan and Partha Chatterjee as well as the second generation of Subalternist historians. These scholars did not themselves support either of the two camps, they rather criticized both. Yet, the secularists argued not only that in rejecting the liberal

Nehruvian conception of the state these authors reinforced the Hindu nationalists, but also that their search for an ‘authentic Indian past, which has survived the ravages of colonialism and modernity . . . brings it dangerously close to the agenda of Hindu nationalism’ (Mathur 2008: 35).

The scholars who developed the subaltern studies during the 1980s were reacting to a reading of history they thought was too elitist. They decided to study history on the basis of the experience of the ‘dominated peoples’. According to the contributors of the Subaltern Studies project, the elitist approach adopted by colonialist, nationalist and Marxist historiographies denied the subalterns their status as agents of history acting independently of the elite (Lal 2005: ch. 4; O’Hanlon 1988; Prakash 1994). But the late 1980s marked a turning point in the movement’s line of research, which moved ‘[from] the militant effort of resurrecting the people’s culture and experience’ to ‘a study deconstructing the discourse of the elites’ (Pouchepadass 2000: 164 and 171). The new generation of subalternist historians is thus located at the intersection of the postmodernist and postcolonial[6] currents (see Eaton 2000). Some of the founding members of the group (particularly Sumit Sarkar) have dissociated themselves from the project as they disapprove of its post-modernist orientation and of the ‘decline of the subaltern in Subaltern Studies’ (Sarkar 2004).

The critique voiced against the postmodern/postcolonial approach argues that it destabilizes conventional discourse and, as a consequence, opens the way for Hindu nationalists and their instrumentalization of history. Generally speaking, the critique of the postmodern position in India focuses on its relativism, its arguments in favour of a return to local culture and its rejection of Western influences, seen as providing a fertile soil for the development of the Hindu nationalist discourse and other types of neo-traditionalism.[7] Yet, the incriminated scholars defend themselves against this accusation (which, they observe, calls for a type of self-censorship). They sustain that they have been critical of the Hindu nationalist discourse that they denounce mainly because of its ‘modernity’ and its use of Western knowledge brought by colonization (see in particular Nandy 1988, 1998 and Madan 1987).

Polarization of positions

The ‘second textbook war’ (the first one having taken place in 1977) that opposed the Hindu and secular nationalist historiographies took place partly through the medium of the press. The two groups replied to each other’s accusations in the daily newspapers. The controversy developed in a politically tense atmosphere with every observation subject to attack, counter-attack, appropriation or incorrect quotation. This overexposure through the media made the labelling of positions an essential element of the debate. Catchy words, referring particularly to the colour with which each group was associated, were widely used. The Congress accused the BJP of ‘saffronizing’

and 'Talibanizing' education, which had to be 'desaffronized' and 'detoxified' after its return to power in 2004. The *Sangh Parivar*, on the other hand, invented the word '*crimsonization*' when the Congress was re-elected in 2004, referring to the Communist party's 'red' influence. The Hindu nationalists also called their opponents 'pseudo-secular communists'.

The two opposite viewpoints were described by sets of contradictory adjectives:

- obscurantist/scientific
- traditional/modern
- revivalist/progressive
- nationalist/(neo-)colonialist
- patriotic/anti-national
- communal/communist
- fascist/Stalinist.

Depending on who is ascribing it, the same adjective can describe one camp or the other. Each group claimed to be patriotic whereas the other was anti-national. Hindu nationalists contended that the secularist's view of history was partial, (neo-)colonialist, communist and Marxist or Stalinist while secularists deemed the Hindu nationalist view as partial, obscurantist, communal and fascist.

Hindu nationalists denounced their adversaries as communists, Marxists or Stalinists. The first two terms were used as synonyms and the last was considered to be the most offensive. Stalinism was brandished as a spectre by Hindu nationalists who, by doing this, referred to the violence with which this movement was associated implying thereby that its supporters constituted a danger. The secularists, on their part, used fascism as a repulsive term. In the secular discourse, there was also a gradation in the words used to describe the rival group ranging from communalist to fascist. By drawing a parallel between Hindu nationalists and fascists, the secularists sounded a warning against the social and political dangers represented by the *Sangh Parivar*.

The tone of the debate was often polemical. Makkhan Lal in particular attacked his detractors in a very personal fashion. Replying to a criticism made by Irfan Habib, Lal declared: 'This "eminent historian's" ignorance about ancient Indian history is simply monumental. Many a time he does not even know what he is talking about' (Lal with Dixit 2005: 196). About Suvira Jaiswal who had reviewed his textbook on *Ancient India* (Class XI) for the Indian History Congress's Report (Habib *et al*. 2003), Lal wrote:

> Suvira Jaiswal must get full marks for scraping the bottom of the barrel. To win the game – yes, a game is what these 'eminent historians' make out of India's history, in slavish tribute to their master Karl Marx, who held that India had no history at all – she has resorted to misquoting passage after passage from my book in order to set them up for ridicule.
>
> (Lal with Dixit 2005: 203)

In her comments, Jaiswal pointed out a quotation used by Lal without acknowledging the source and she adds that 'Makkhan Lal seems usually to pick out unnamed authors for quotation whose utterances are as woolly-headed as his own' (Jaiswal in Habib *et al.* 2003: 49).[8] To which Makkhan Lal replied: 'Famous last word! Their eminences stand exposed before the people of India. The unnamed "woolly-headed" author of those lines is H.G. Wells. The quote is from *The Outline of History*: *Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind* (Lal with Dixit 2005: 221–2).

The tone adopted by the Left, though less polemical, was tinged with subtle ridicule and condescension. Irfan Habib, in his critique of the history section of the textbook for Class VI, frequently punctuates his sentences with exclamation marks, qualifying Lal's statements as absurd and some of his observations as proofs of his ignorance. These remarks indicate the Left's paternalistic and superior attitude towards its adversaries. The secular historians replied to the Hindu nationalists by adopting the condescending tone of custodians of logic, science and the English language. Makkhan Lal underlines this last point, which he sees as the perpetuation of colonial domination.

> All 'eminent historians' take pride in their knowledge of English language, flaunt their foreign degrees and feel blessed in carrying the burden heaped on them by the likes of James Mill and J.B. Macaulay. As a result, a large number of suggestions have been made from the 'better-English-language' point of view. The 'experts' have picked up sentences and given their alternatives, little realizing that each individual has his own style of writing, and the author of these books could very well end up giving a huge number of suggestions for the improvement of English in the books published by experts.
>
> (Lal with Dixit 2005: 253)

Lal may be referring here to Habib's critique drawing attention to a map carrying the heading 'The Harsha's Empire' and about which Habib asks, 'What kind of English will children learn from such ignorant use of the article "the"?' (Habib *et al.* 2003: 22).

The controversy went far beyond the academic framework. The attacks became personal on both sides. However, the Hindu nationalists have without doubt been much more threatening in their discourse and deeds. Romila Thapar has been particularly targeted by the virulence of the *Sangh*'s organizations. She received death threats and in 2003 a petition was launched on the internet against her being appointed as First Holder of the Kluge Chair in Countries and Cultures of the South at the Library of Congress (in the United States). The petition alleged that she was a Marxist and that her work was Eurocentric and anti-Hindu. 'The ongoing campaign by Romila Thapar and others to discredit Hindu civilization is a war of cultural genocide', the petition

continued and then asked '[w]hy waste our American resources on a Marxist ideological assault on Hindu civilization?' (petitiononline 2003a). Another petition proposed that Koenraad Elst be appointed instead of Romila Thapar (petitiononline 2003b). (As we have seen concerning the debate in California, Michael Witzel also had to face harsh attacks from Hindu nationalist groups.[9])

The Hindu nationalist discourse

The aim of the remainder of this chapter is to present the arguments advanced by Hindu and secular nationalists regarding their view of history and its importance for the nation. I attempt to reconstruct a possible consistency in each discourse by bringing together multiple voices and trying to structure them around one main plot or a group of arguments. Both discourses are variations around the themes of defence and enemies. The argument advanced by Hindu nationalists revolves around the restoration of Hindu pride, the defence of Hindu values, Indian history and the Indian nation in general against the colonial, communist and Muslim enemies; the arguments of secular nationalists concern the defence of liberal values (secularism, tolerance and reason) against the obscurantism of Hindu nationalism.

Hindu nationalists feel that the Left imposed its views on the content of school education as long as it dominated the political system and education.[10] It imposed the version of history corresponding to its ideology. Vijay Kumar Malhotra, a BJP leader, argues that:

> [f]or more than 30 years, historians Romila Thapar, Satish Chandra, R.S. Sharma, Bipan Chandra and others enjoyed such great political backing from the Congress establishment that they convinced themselves that they, and they alone, possessed god's gift of the ability to interpret India's past. They operated as a cartel and prevented others from articulating alternative points of view.
>
> (Malhotra 2001 HT)

According to the BJP, the reactions of secular historians were motivated mainly by their desire to retain control over the writing of history. Hindu nationalist historians emphasize that they were kept away from the institutional and academic production of history as the field was totally dominated by Marxist historians. That is why J.S. Rajput, director of NCERT opined that far from leading to communalization of Indian history, the decision to rewrite history textbooks simply opened the field to writers of different ideological persuasions (Rajput 2004 HT).[11] Putting forth a similar argument, Arun Shourie published a book in which he denounces the monopoly on state resources and their misuse by those he calls 'eminent historians'.[12] Shourie uses this term only in inverted commas to show his scepticism about (or his derision for) this adjective commonly used by the press to describe secular nationalist historians, particularly B. Chandra, S. Chandra, R.S. Sharma and R. Thapar (Shourie 1998).

The colonial enemy

The Hindu nationalists argue that the non-recognition of the glorious Indian past – according to them, one of the most important biases of secular historiography – is in fact a colonial legacy: the British during the colonial period imposed their reading of Indian history, and as part of their strategy of domination, they deprived Indians of the grandeur of their past. According to the *Sangh Parivar*, the real purpose of the education system established by the British was to devalue Indian culture to keep the colonized people in a subordinate position. Moreover, it did not stop when the British left and this colonial heritage is to be seen even today in the education system. As a consequence Hindu nationalists think that it is their duty now to strive for the 'decolonisation of the Hindu mind' (Elst 2001).[13] According to Elst's analysis, the Hindu nationalist movement

> tries to free the Indians from the colonial condition at the mental and cultural level, to complete the process of political and economic decolonization. The need for 'reviving' Hinduism springs from the fact that the said hostile ideologies (mostly Islam) have managed to eliminate Hinduism physically in certain geographical parts and social segments of India, and also (mostly the Western ideologies) to neutralize the Hindu spirit among many nominal Hindus.
>
> (Elst 2001: 10)

According to the *Sangh Parivar*, the depreciation of Indian culture was perpetuated after independence by the Anglicized Marxist elite to which secular historians belong (e.g. see Ray 1999 Org.). The latter are accused of having a weakness or sympathy for British domination. Having received a Western education, they are supposed to have moved away from their country's values and culture to such an extent that they do not understand them any more. In a review of the 'untrue' statements in the old history textbooks, Atul Rawat, who writes a regular column in the *Organiser*, questions Satish Chandra's assertion in *Medieval India*, according to which Sankara's philosophy was understood only by a handful of persons and did not therefore influence the vast majority of Indian people (Chandra 2004: 33). For Rawat, this assertion only betrays the limitations of a westernized mind. He observes that:

> [t]he author could even now come to my village and talk to an old man of his choice and understand from him such concepts of Adishankaracharya like Maya, Brahma, and Mithya. Only because of the western orientation of his mind, the learned professor is not able to understand the Indian people's mind and their philosophic tone and tenor.
>
> (Rawat 2004: 22)

K.S. Sudarshan, who was *sarsanghchalak* of the RSS (i.e. its senior-most leader), emphasizes that India is suffering because of the Hindu's lack

of self-confidence. He sees the British as the source of the problem and holds the communists responsible for its perpetuation:

> The main reason for this [lack of confidence] is the success that the Britishers got in developing a so called educated section with slave mentality through their educational method. The *Sangh Parivar* feels that this atmosphere of lack of confidence must be removed and an atmosphere of self-confidence needs to be developed everywhere.
>
> (Surdarshan, cited in Org. 2002)

In the latter part of his speech, Sudarshan contests the truth of several ideas propagated, according to him, by the British and taught to Indian students even today. These ideas, according to the *sarsanghchalak*, are a legacy of colonization and, though erroneous, they persist and deny India the status of a nation; they describe the defence of the Hindu community's interests as communalism and claim that there is no scientific tradition in India.

In the same vein, the author of an article entitled *Decolonise History Textbooks* stresses the urgent need to modify textbooks in order to give them a Hindu perspective:

> Numerous distortions have been injected in history books first to serve the interests of our erstwhile colonial masters and then to indoctrinate the impressionable youth with the Communist dogma. No one needs to be apologetic about reinterpreting history in our national perspective and ethos. We don't have to study history from a western or Communist perspective. Indian perspective is and should be the guiding principle.
>
> (Khosla 2001 Org.)

The defence of the Indian perspective is an argument repeatedly used by Hindu nationalists to justify the rewriting of history textbooks. According to them, the comprehension of Indian history by secular historians is limited and deformed by their Western point of view.[14] Moreover, only an Indian perspective allows to recognise the continuity of the civilization and to understand the true value of its achievements. The Hindu nationalist discourse constructs an Indian nation whose roots go back to the Vedic Age and that has been perpetuating itself to the present time. According to M. Jain, the distinction between the old textbooks and the NDA textbooks lies precisely in their perspective:

> We did not see Indian history as an offshoot of what was taking place in Europe. The fundamental difference is that the old books were not seeing Indian history in terms of itself. . . . We made India the centre of our narrative. They [speaking about the authors of the old textbooks] made India an appendage. . . .

> They do not want us to take any pride in our achievements. They deny continuity in civilization. They deny that India was a great civilization in the past. Their argument is that there is no such thing as Hindus before the nineteenth century. They say that it is a result of colonial rule. Identity formation results of British policies of divide and rule. They say that we are projecting today back into the past.
>
> (Interview with M. Jain, January 2005)

In this view, the negation of this continuity is intended to detach contemporary India from its glorious past so that the new generations forget that India's history is richer than most present-day civilizations (Lal with Dixit 2005: 253). This type of assertion gives rise to interrogations about the motives that might drive some historians to want to separate contemporary India from its past: why should anyone want the new generations to forget the past and who would want or benefit from such a detachment? The Hindu nationalists reply to these questions by pointing an accusing finger at the communists.

The communist enemy

The danger represented by the communists or Marxists is omnipresent in the Hindu nationalist discourse. The former colonizers seem to be distant figures while the communists constitute a tangible threat. During conversations with some of the authors of the NDA textbooks, as well as with other historians and political figures close to the *Sangh Parivar*, they all declared that communists played the role of 'enemy number one'. M. Lal affirmed during an interview in Delhi in January 2005 that the dominant group (the Marxists) had not permitted any correction of the history taught in schools, which is why, even today, students learn a version that denigrates Indian culture and civilization (also see Lal with Dixit 2005: 8–19). Following this assertion, I asked him to explain why the Marxists had acted in this manner and he replied:

> In Marxist philosophy, history is the core. For the Marxists, history is not a discipline of enquiring the past; it is a vehicle to introduce change in society. For the Marxists, the ammunition for revolution is history. In the Indian context, they thought the British brand of history is the best for revolution. Marxism emphasizes a new society. So it is necessary to forget about the past or denigrate the past, otherwise you don't want to get rid of it. So Indians should forget about history for the Marxists. They want to make the past so distasteful so that they do not want to remember it. They do not want to think about it. School textbooks are the best vehicle for this psychological war.
>
> (Interview with M. Lal, January 2005)

In short, according to Lal, Marxists denigrate the past so that Indians do not want to remember it, which would allow them to build a new society governed by their ideology.

This perception of the communists as a threat was already evident in *Bunch of Thoughts* (1966), one of the books written by M.S. Golwalkar, the second *sarsanghchalak* of the RSS. The chapter entitled 'Internal Threats' is subdivided into three parts dealing with the Muslims, the Christians and the communists. The presence of Muslims and Christians in this threatening triad was to be expected as they belong to the category of 'outsiders' in the Hindu nationalist discourse, but the inclusion of communists is more surprising. Golwalkar puts forward three arguments to condemn communism (or socialism – terms that he uses indiscriminately): it is an ideology that is opposed to religion, anti-democratic and of foreign origin. According to Golwalkar, communism as an alien ideology has no place in India, especially because it is also an atheist ideology. Further, the revolutionary bent of communism endangers the 'natural order' by wanting to eliminate class (or caste) distinction (Pandey 1993: 153 and 158). The context might also have played a part in Golwalkar's position as, in 1962, China launched a series of attacks against India in some disputed territories (Pandey 1993: 252).[15] Faced with ill-prepared Indian troops, China seized these territories rapidly and declared a cease-fire. This attack and India's subsequent defeat stunned the Indian people. Following these events, diplomatic relations between the two countries were strained for more than 40 years.

The arguments and fears expressed by Golwalkar in the late 1960s persist in the contemporary Hindu nationalist discourse. Hindu nationalists perceive the decisions pertaining to education taken by successive communist governments in West Bengal as a proof of the existence of a communist threat. This state provides, according to the *Sangh Parivar*, an example of the catastrophic situation in which the country would be plunged if the communists were to govern at the Union level (Hande 2004 Org.). It is interesting to note that the Hindu nationalists make no mention of Kerala, which is the other state where the communists have been in power since the 1960s. The reason might lie in the fact that Kerala, which is a prosperous state and has the highest level of literacy in India, does not provide an example of poor governance and of the threat posed by a communist government.

Since 1977, West Bengal has been governed by a coalition called the Left Front led by the CPI(M). This coalition was accused of introducing a communist bias into the history textbooks.[16] Ashoke Dasgupta in the *Organiser* explains what, according to him, are the goals pursued by the communists:

> Why is the history syllabus so sorely afflicted in West Bengal? . . . Let the poor, unemployed, aggrieved youth force suffer from loss of self-identity and remain ignorant about national and cultural heritage, so that the Marxists may have sufficient cannon fodder devoid of nationalism. Red revolution needs Red terrorism first – the passage from terrorism to

> power is the Marxist way of revolution. This is the reason as to why Marxists are opposed to nationalism, and albeit sympathisers of Islamic terrorism. They want to hide the national history because they are aware that positive national feeling has the potential to uproot their corrupt, inefficient and repressive governance.
>
> (Dasgupta 2004b Org.)

Dasgupta argues that these textbooks were inspired by textbooks used in the former Soviet Union (Dasgupta 2004a Org.). The critics of the West Bengal history books draw attention to the secondary position given to Indian history in these textbooks. M. Lal observes that the history textbook used in West Bengal for Class VI devotes only 28 out of 117 pages to Indian history (Lal with Dixit 2005: 269).

Dasgupta's interpretation of the rewriting of history textbooks under instructions from communists in West Bengal follows the same logic as Lal's interpretation of the communists' attempts to disregard the country's illustrious past. This neglect of Indian history cuts off Indians from their past and their nation and prevents them from being proud of their history, thus giving free rein to the communists to impose their ideology. This would allow communists to set up or preserve an ahistorical communist society having its roots not in Indian civilization but in Marxist ideology.

The Muslim enemy

We have already looked at the role attributed to the influence of colonialism and its heir, the westernized intelligentsia, and more particularly at the role played by Marxists in the Hindu nationalist interpretation of the debate. We will now take up the role of the last 'M' in the 'trilogy', the *Madrasawallahs* or Muslims. The argument put forward is that the *Sangh Parivar* is determined to restore the pride of Indians in their own achievements by teaching children about the greatness of the Indian nation, which was built *in spite of* the repeated assaults by 'Muslim invaders'. Marxists are often held jointly responsible for the ills attributed to Muslims as illustrated by the following statement of K.S. Sudarshan:

> The previous NDA government made efforts to remove all such shortcomings, introduced innovations and tried to rewrite the history textbooks. But the Marx*putras* who have always been traitors and lacked patriotism, raised a hue and cry, terming it as 'saffronisation'. They had supported the Muslim League's proposal for creating Pakistan in 1940. . . .
>
> (Sudarshan 2004 Org., italics in the original)[17]

In the Hindu nationalist discourse, Muslims represent the 'Other', *the enemy within that has come from outside*.[18] There is a certain amount of tension about the place assigned to Muslim Indians because they are Indian citizens (which is why they are insiders), but Hindu nationalists also treat them as outsiders

and 'externalize' them by equating them with 'foreign enemies' (Pakistanis and Bangladeshis). Hence, Muslim Indians become 'outsiders within'.[19]

Let us see how this works: the Hindu nationalist discourse considers Muslims as outsiders from an historical, as well as from a contemporary, point of view. First (and historically), Hindu nationalists equate all Muslims with the 'invaders' who brought Islam to India. This idea was already present in Savarkar's book written in 1923 (*Hindutva. Who is a Hindu?*), the founding text of Hindu nationalism in which he defines the concept of *Hindutva*. A Hindu is 'a person who regards the land of Bharatvarsha from Indus to the Seas as his Fatherland as well as his Holyland – that is the cradle of his religion' (Savarkar quoted in Kanungo 2003: 93–4). India is the holy land of the Hindus but it is not the holy land of the Muslims or the Christians. This definition sets out Christians and Muslims as outsiders.

Second, the Hindu nationalist discourse stresses that Muslims are a part of a larger community that includes believers in other countries, especially Pakistan, the principal enemy of Hindu nationalists. According to them, Pakistan was created by dismembering the motherland (because of Partition). Indian Muslims are often accused of being loyal to Pakistan and seen as crypto-Pakistanis (Metcalf 1995: 963), and therefore considered as 'foreign' enemies. The large number of Bangladeshi immigrants in India, who are seen as 'foreign infiltrators' by the *Sangh Parivar*, also helps to strengthen this perception of Muslims as 'outsiders within' (Chatterji 2009: ch. 2; Gupta and Sharma 1996: 9; Ramachandran 2003). This discourse results in the 'externalization' of Indian Muslims by equating them with foreign nationals following the same religion.[20]

Nevertheless, and somewhat in contradiction to the above-mentioned view on Muslims, Hindu nationalists like to point out that Muslims are actually Hindus, either originally because they are for the most part descendants of Hindus converted to Islam, or by assimilation because their culture is essentially Hindu. K.G. Acharya affirms in an article published in the *Organiser* in January 2001 that:

> [n]obody will blame the present day Muslims for the destruction caused by Muslim invaders in the past, if they also join in condemning the latter's deeds of large-scale violence, loot, arson and desecration of temples done in the past. Most of the present day Muslims were Hindus before the conversion of their ancestors for which in fact everybody should have pity on them.

To this may be added the injunction to Indian Muslims that they should accept the Hindu foundation of their culture because it is the basis of all communities in India, be they Hindus, Muslims or Christians (Kashikar 2002 Org.).

Hindu nationalists tend to secularize the meaning of the term Hindu by referring to its earlier meaning of 'belonging to India' and by identifying India as the nation of Hindus, yet without totally eliminating the

contemporary religious connotations of the term (Brass 1990: 16–17). In the times of Alexander the Great, the term 'Hindu' did not have any religious significance. It was used to designate persons living to the east of the Indus, but this changed during the colonial period. Notably for census operations, the population was then divided into categories based on religion and the 'Hindus' constituted one of these categories (Cohn 1987). However, it seems that the use of the word remained fluid till the end of the nineteenth century when it came to refer mainly to persons belonging to a particular religious tradition (or group of traditions) (Pandey 1993: 245–6). Nowadays, Hindu nationalists instrumentalize the history of this word. Despite the fact that its use today is unequivocal, they refer to its old (non-religious) meaning but without discarding its present religious associations.[21]

The 'Other' in the Hindu nationalist discourse can also be Christian. This Christian 'Other' generally appears in the discourse in connection with the tribal areas where organizations of the *Sangh Parivar* are active against what they see as the danger of Christian missionaries' proselytism. The *Sangh* believes that Christianity poses a threat to the Hindu nation because the missionaries convert – sometimes 'by force' – Dalits and Adivasis. However, I do not share John Zavos's analysis (2001: 75) according to which the Hindu nationalist discourse changed in the mid-1990s with Muslims ceasing to be the principal threat to the Hindu nation and ceding their place to Christians, thus returning to its original source of concern. There have undoubtedly been many attacks on Christians, but I would nevertheless argue that for Hindu nationalists the Muslims remain the principal enemy of the Hindu nation.

The invasion of alien culture and national pride

The Hindu nationalist narrative is built around the 'need ot stand against the invasion of the alien culture' as expressed by K.S. Sudarshan (2004: 11).

After the BJP lost power in 2004, the *Vidya Bharati* organization set up SBAS. This organization has published a series of 15 booklets on topics related to the educational principles to be followed and the danger posed by the return to power of the Congress. Several of these booklets have a polemical tone, and the one written by Atul Rawat is especially virulent. It is entitled 'Return of the Reds: Horrors of Communist Historiography'. The exaggeration evident in the foreword by Dina Nath Batra is in consonance with the rest of the text:

> The anti-India history writing had been the main trend of academic life of India since almost one thousand years now. But in last two hundred years, these efforts have gathered all the more momentum. The unholy alliance of followers of Macaulay, Marx and Madrasas has further intensified the anti-India tirade during the last five decades. For about five years or so, a cool breeze of Indianisation did flow in this country during the NDA government, when some nationalists were able to guide the

> education towards Indianisation, indigenisation, nationalization and spiritualization. But after a change in government, the old trend is back.
>
> . . . The Shiksha Bacho Andolan is a response by the nationalist Indians to this onslaught on our history and thus on our identity. The onslaught this time is not by foreigners. It is by *Indians of foreign mentality* and extra territorial loyalties. In Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi's words they are 'resident Non Indians'. Their onslaught has to be resisted and dismantled.[22]
>
> (Foreword by D.N. Batra in Rawat 2004: 1–2)

Atul Rawat then goes on to criticize the old history textbooks:

> An overview will show that many of the misinterpretations and misrepresentations are so dangerous to the Indian nationhood that they had to be discarded by the NDA government. Now when the Congress led UPA government is in power with the support of the Communists they are bringing back the books written by leftist historians. This is a struggle for the minds of the future generation and if they are allowed to be captured by anti-national and unpatriotic forces, the very existence of the nation will be in jeopardy. The history which terms the Aryans as foreigners and Mughals as indigenous, which calls Guru Teg Bahadur as a person involved in plunder and rapine while calling Aurangzeb as a zinda-pir or a living saint, which portrays Guru Arjun Dev as a thug and Shivaji as a regional leader to create Maratha nationalism, which teaches Ram, Krishna and Shiv as myth and the sacrifice of Padmini as a folk-tale and teaches great Indian revolutionaries as terrorists cannot be allowed to be taught to the next generation of India.
>
> (Rawat 2004: 10)

He concludes with the following words: 'Since all of them (Marxists, Macaulayists and Madrasawallahs), have been foreigners either by descent or by ideology, their basic interest is in humiliating their Indian subjects of yesteryears so as to continue to remain in power' (Rawat 2004: 35).

'Foreigners' are, therefore, at the heart of the historiographical narrative of the Hindu nationalists. According to them, it is the knowledge of history and its past glory that will enable Indians to resist foreign culture by restoring the pride of Hindus in general and by allowing the youth in particular to regain the confidence needed to defend their nation. History is perceived as an instrument of national regeneration.

For revitalizing the nation, history must also serve as an inspiration for the future. J.S. Rajput, former director of the NCERT, described the role of the teaching of history in the following words:

> History, according to a famous philosopher, is useless to mankind, except as an educational tool. It may be a dynamic field of research for

> academics, but for the vast majority of the people of any country, history learning fits a broader national objective. Children, being tomorrow's denizens of the state and its institutions, must be taught to take pride in their collective past, seek inspiration from the progenitors' achievements and suffering as the case may be, and move on. And, because the vast majority learn all their history in school at a time of life when their mental state is most delicate, it is important to handle history with kid gloves.
>
> (Rajput 2002 *The Pioneer*)

However, this view of history as a source of pride and inspiration is not the prerogative of Hindu nationalists. Ashgar Ali Engineer wrote in 2000 in a collection of articles published by the SFI (affiliated to CPI(M)),

> History tells us about our heritage and inculcates a sense of pride in us. . . . What is essential is to make us proud of our Indianness. History should be so written that a child should be able to take pride in the entire past, not only in part of it. The [NDA] textbooks are an extremely partisan view of the past and Rana Sanga, Rana Pratap and Shivaji are projected as heroes and those who fought for liberating Hindus from Muslim tyranny.
>
> (Engineer 2000: 29)

This similarity of views regarding the function assigned to history prompts us to analyse the secular interpretation of history and we will see several other parallels that will remind us of the Hindu nationalist narrative.

The secular nationalist discourse

Against what was seen as the Hindu nationalist assault on education and history, the secular Left positioned itself as the defender: the defender of secularism and national unity against the threat posed by the Sangh Parivar; the defender of tolerance and harmony between the different communities living in India; and the defender of the scientific and rational spirit against the lack of professionalism of the Hindu nationalist historians and, particularly, their use of unscientific methods mixing myth and history.

The defence of secularism and national unity

The most prominent argument in the Left's discourse concerned the endangering of secularism.[23] The Left felt that the BJP's participation in government and, generally speaking, the acquisition of power by the *Sangh Parivar* represented a grave danger for secularism as the foundation of the modern Indian state despite the fact that the Hindu nationalists also present themselves as defenders of secularism. They even consider themselves to be the real protectors of this principle as opposed to the Left who, according to them, is only 'pseudo-secular', i.e. pro-Muslims and Christians but anti-Hindu.

Hindu nationalists declare that they support a 'positive secularism' in line with Gandhi's idea of *sarva dharma samabhava* or equal respect for all religions. They argue that their opposition to a separate civil law for Muslims is grounded on this very principle, which implies that all religious communities should be treated as equal before the law. As a consequence, laws and policies according special treatment to the minorities are seen as pseudo-secular measures supported by the Left. In this regard, the most important difference is to be found in the domain of personal law. The Hindu code concerning marriage, divorce and, in general, family matters has been revised and transposed into a civil code whereas the Muslims' family laws are still regulated by the sharia. The Shah Bano controversy illustrated the problems posed by these two different regimes working in parallel and sometimes containing contradictory elements (see Chapter 1). The Hindu nationalists militate for the replacement of the actual system by a uniform civil code. They base their demand on Article 44 included in the Constitution since its coming into force in 1950, which states that '[t]he State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India'. However, the elaboration of this common system is not yet realized.[24]

Furthermore, the *Sangh Parivar* declares that only organizations representing Hindu values can be truly secular since Hinduism is the only religion that is really tolerant.[25] The Left retorts that the secularism supported by the *Sangh Parivar* is no more than a brutal rule of the majority (or a form of majoritarianism) leaving the minorities at its mercy. And, according to secular nationalists, if minorities feel threatened, national unity is threatened. The reasoning makes national integration dependent on secularism: giving up secularism would lead to the nation's disintegration. The fear that the country's unity is in danger is a recurrent theme in the discourse of the Left-leaning historians. Irfan Habib argued that national integrity was threatened not only because the reforms introduced by the BJP were hostile to Muslims but also because they were hostile to the inhabitants of South India: 'Muslims have no place in Indian history. But the RSS brigade is also anti-Dravidian. Is it promoting national integration? So it is not a question of history alone but that of the country's future' (Habib, quoted in IE 2001).

Concerns about preserving national unity and the necessity of promoting it are present in reports and education policies published since independence. These documents further the idea of 'a monolithic and united nation' (Advani 1996: 2077–8), even if the unity leaves some space for cultural diversity and regional differences. The slogan 'unity in diversity' is frequently invoked to define the founding principle of the Indian Union. It is nevertheless essential to note that if diversity is recognized and encouraged it is only in its superficial aspect that is non-threatening for the country's unity. The 'parts' are recognized in their singularities but their only acceptable mode of existence is within the national. Their difference should not become a threat to the country's unity, as did the regional secessionist movements (in Kashmir, Punjab, Nagaland and Assam). The expression of difference leading to a desire

for autonomy caused a great deal of concern for 'territorial integrity'. The fear of dismemberment resonates all the more as it feeds on the feeling present since Partition that the nation's body has been mutilated as Nehru expressed in a speech delivered at the Council of World Affairs in New Delhi in March 1949:

> All our communications were upset and broken. Telegraphs, telephones, postal services, railway services and almost everything, as a matter of fact was disrupted. Our Services were broken up. Our army was broken up. Our irrigation systems were broken up and so many other things happened. If we were to go on making a list of all, there would be a large number of them. But above all, what was broken up which was of the highest importance was something very vital and that was the body of India.
>
> (Nehru 1971: 247)

Secular nationalism, just like Hindu nationalism,[26] claims to be the protector of India's national integrity. The two national imaginaries are based on the conception of a sacred geography (Varshney 1993: 238). Thus the threat of the dislocation of the nation and the state is present in both types of discourses, each one claiming that the failure to respect its principles would lead to the country's break-up.

The defence of harmony and tolerance

By denouncing the reforms introduced in the education system by the BJP government and by arguing that these changes would only encourage discord and intolerance and incite communal violence, the secular nationalist historians set themselves up as guardians of tolerance and harmony between different communities against the assaults launched by Hindu nationalists. As noted earlier, in the old textbooks, the secular nationalist historians were keen to show that India's history was a mosaic of many cultures, conveying thereby the picture of harmonious coexistence and even of a fruitful blending. During the controversy, many observers highlighted the virtues and necessity of such an inclusive view of history against the dangers that the Hindu nationalist view brought for society as a whole, as illustrated by the quote below:

> From the early days of the freedom movement, historians in this country have been engaged in constructing a vision of the past that every citizen can identify with. This is no chimera – behind the smokescreen of prejudice that the RSS brigade strives desperately to maintain, can be found the solid factual substratum of a common history which alone can be the basis for a sense of shared destiny for the diverse people of this nation. But a nation of diversities is anathema for hindutva and no fact so absolute that it cannot be deleted from the texts.
>
> (Murlidharan 2002: 6)

The fear expressed by secular intellectuals concerning the rewriting of history textbooks was that Hindu nationalist historians infused in them their anti-pluralist conception of society that will result in children assimilating this intolerant worldview when learning their history lessons. According to SAHMAT (2002b: 12), '[t]his onslaught on history would not only communalize young minds and thereby contribute to an undermining of the secular foundations of our polity, but also destroy the discipline of history itself'.

In an article on the censorship of the old history textbooks, Praful Bidwai says that the rewriting of these textbooks amounts to 'an assault on the pluralist-secular conception of India'. He claims that the aim of the Hindu nationalists is 'to erase one central truth about Indian culture and civilisation for 2000 years – namely, its plural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious character'.

> BJP apologists have rationalised textbook censorship as a means of promoting 'tolerance' by removing passages that can 'hurt sentiments' (of Jats, Sikhs and other communities). In reality, it amounts to promoting the sum-total of intolerances by appeasing varying parochial sentiments. Nor is the present controversy an esoteric dispute between Liberal-Left scholars and others. Rather, it separates those who see history as a truthful account of reality, which demands continual reinterpretation, from those who yoke history to narrow 'nation-building' agendas inculcating irrational national 'pride'. The latter will make whole generations ignorant. They will breed hatred and hubris – as Hitler did with his Master Race myth. Under the BJP's 'leadership', India seems headed that way – and at least toward the destruction of secularism and pluralism. Nothing could be more dangerous.
> (Bidwai 2001b FL)

The champions of secularism frequently accused the *Sangh Parivar* of practising a form of fascism. However, in the debate this comparison (be it justified or not) was rarely supported by arguments or justifications.[27] It was generally used as a shortcut and considered sufficient in itself to point at the dangerousness of the Hindu nationalists.

The defence of science and reason

Secular intellectuals stress their professionalism as well as their ideological detachment. They criticize Hindu nationalists for being amateurish and for using history for purely utilitarian purposes. This is the argument put forth by Mushirul Hasan, professor of history at *Jamia Millia Islamia*, who declares concerning the controversy: 'Indeed, the issue is between prejudice and propaganda on the one hand and rational arguments and scholarship on the other' (Hasan 2004: 172). Praful Bidwai expresses a similar opinion:

> the real contest is not between the Right and the Left, between two extreme and intolerant positions, but between an obsessively nationalistic,

> narrowly chauvinistic view of Indian culture and society, on the one hand, and on the other, a set of many plural, liberal, tolerant, often conflicting, premises which recognise the ordinariness of all cultures and the contributions to Indian society from multiple sources all over the world.
> (Bidwai 2004 FT)

Many Left-leaning intellectuals believe that the two positions cannot be considered side by side as they represent two completely different worlds: on one side science and on the other propaganda. Consequently, the authors of the old textbooks should not be compared to the authors of the NDA textbooks because such a comparison assigns the same value – though in an unfounded and arbitrary manner – to the opinions of the *Sangh Parivar*'s propagandists and those of eminent historians.[28] An article by R. Thapar entitled 'History vs Propaganda' illustrates this point of view.

> What is really at stake in the current row over history textbooks is the right of *the professional historians to assert the pre-eminence of history over myth and fantasy*. . . . In other words, writing history is a complicated process. This is not understood very often at the popular level, and certainly not by the politicians who are currently criticising the history we write. This then raises the question of who judges what is valid history. The validity has to be judged by professional historians who may criticise these books and whose criticism we would take seriously (provided they are professional historians) . . . there is an attempt to falsify history in order to prove the theories on which the Hindutva ideology is based. For example, the historical primacy of a distinctive Aryan people is maintained. . . . What is happening is that there is a building up of a fantasy that is being thrust upon students in the guise of historical knowledge.
> (Thapar 2001 ToI, emphasis added)

Thapar suggests that the judgement on the validity of a historical representation should be left to professional historians. This brings the question of the conditions required for being admitted among the professional historians. The entry is guarded by the academic community, which tends to give preference to persons sharing the same points of view. The Left-leaning academics who dominated the field of social sciences were unwilling to confer the status of professional historians on scholars who flaunted ideological leanings that they abhorred.

For these reasons, secular historians did not take seriously the arguments advanced by their adversaries. It is significant to note in this context that when Gyanendra Pandey writes about what he calls the 'new Hindu history', he bases his analysis only on booklets and pamphlets that can be bought along with cassettes, posters and pictures of gods and goddesses in pilgrimage centres (Pandey 1996). He limits his study of Hindu nationalist historiography to an

extremely popular version of this type of history as he does not refer to the books published by Hindu nationalist historians.[29]

Most secularists have discredited the Hindu nationalist discourse by assimilating everything linked with it with irrationality and obscurantism leading to communal violence.[30] In contrast, the Left positions itself as the custodian of reason and science. I quote below from an article in which Prabhat Patnaik, a renowned Marxist economist and a professor in the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning at JNU, puts forward this very argument.

> [W]hat this government is doing to education is the precursor to nothing less than *an assault on reason*. What we are concerned about is not ideological differences, in the sense of differences in the sets of beliefs we hold, where each person holds beliefs in a necessarily provisional manner at every moment and is constantly testing these beliefs through the use of reason applied to experience. Such differences permit rational discourses; our concern precisely is that an ideology is being promoted that denies rational discourse. . . .
>
> *What we are witnessing is . . . an attempt to constrict the space for rational discourse.* This attempt is sinister because it impinges on the lives of the people. It is a fallacy to believe that the snuffing out of rational discourse is a matter concerning only the intelligentsia; it is even more fundamentally and directly a matter affecting the people, since the flourishing of rational discourse is a necessary condition for the people's march towards freedom.
>
> (Patnaik 2001 FL, emphasis added)[31]

I could quote many more examples in which members of the Left commit themselves to defend reason and science. However, this position is sometimes not devoid of a certain amount of ambiguity between what is rational and what is not and why as shown by the statements made by Salman Khurshid, a Congress leader:

> We are not just for de-saffronisation, but for rationalisation of education as well. . . . *We must ensure the courses we teach are befitting a modern, rational, forward-looking country*. . . . Supporting rationality does not mean we are opposed to Hindu culture. We may oppose astrology, but not ayurveda. . . . Only extreme, sectarian moves of the BJP-led government would be undone. Unlike in the case of the Marxists, there isn't a clear divide between what the BJP does and what we in the Congress find acceptable. . . . We maintain ours is a pluralistic society, but we also recognise that Hindus constitute 85 per cent of that society and hence the Hindu element will be dominant. We believe in supporting the Mansarovar pilgrimage, as well as the Haj.
>
> (Mukerji 2004 TW, emphasis added)

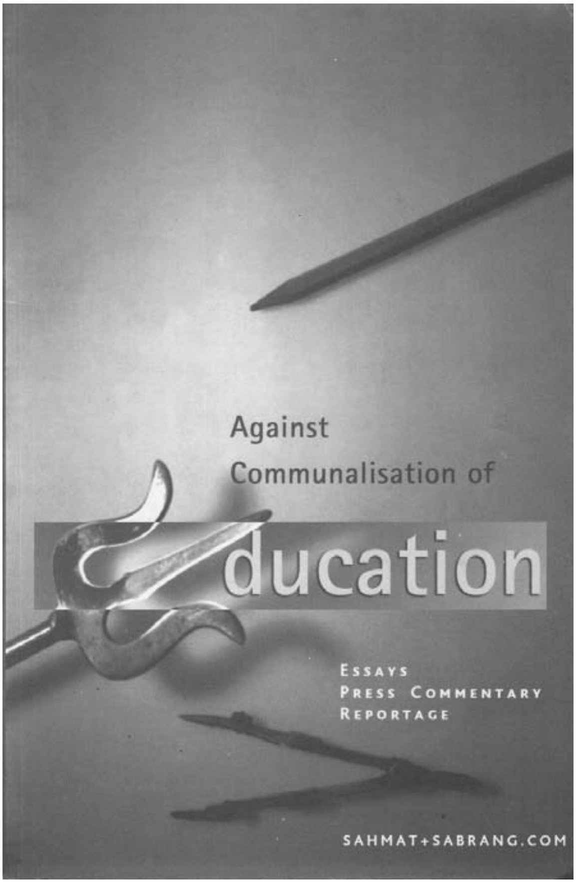


Figure 4.1 The *trishul* against the compass
Source: Copyright Ram Rahman and SAHMAT

An image composed by Ram Rahman encapsulates well the debate as it is seen by the Left: a conflict between science and rationality on the one hand and religion and obscurantism on the other (see Figure 4.1). This image first adorned a cloth banner during a conference against the communalization of education organized by SAHMAT in 2001 and was later used on the cover of a collection of articles on the same subject.[32] The picture is composed of a trident (*trishul*), one of *Shiva*'s attributes taken here to symbolize religion and Hindu nationalism, confronted by a pencil and a compass representing science and secularism. However, the Hindu nationalists argue, on the contrary, that they are the ones who defend 'the science of history' from the Left's ideological deviations. The Hindu nationalist version of the compass against the trident would be the compass against the hammer and sickle.

Convergences: modernity, science and the nation-state

History, science and myth

Hindu nationalist historians reply to the secularists' criticism by stressing their allegiance to the science of history. Moreover, they accuse the secularists of being the ones not following a scientific approach. Finding fault with Marxist historians, Makkhan Lal says:

> problems begin when the hard facts of history are trimmed, selectively quoted, or presented in a coloured and distorted manner, or even swept under the carpet to suit the historian's agenda. Such attempts and practices lead to the presentation of not only incorrect history but also distorted history, which finally results in the distortion of a nation's history, its people's past and their identity. Those involved in such defiling of history do everything to justify their version of history and strive hard to retain their powers, position and privileges by any and all means.
>
> . . . Another point that needs to be emphasized is that a historian's job is not that of a cook who prepares dishes as per the liking of his customers and adds spices accordingly. It is not the job of a historian to write politically correct history. His obligation is to write factually correct history.
>
> (Lal with Dixit 2005: 71 and 75)

Thus, the Left as well as the Hindu Right defend the scientificity of their narratives, and in the field of history this claim rests on the use of sources. Regarding the textbooks, in the first as well as the second series only the books on ancient India (by R.S. Sharma and Makkhan Lal) contain a chapter on sources and on the method used to study ancient history. Both textbooks mention numismatic, epigraphic and architectural sources as well as Indian and foreign literary sources. The historical reliability of these sources is nevertheless presented in a slightly, but significantly, different manner. R.S. Sharma explains that the historical value of literary sources (such as the Vedas, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the Puranas, etc.) is limited:

> Archaeological evidence should be considered far more important than long family trees given in the Puranas. The Puranic tradition could be used to date Rama of Ayodhya around 2000 BC, but diggings and extensive explorations in Ayodhya do not show any settlement around that date. Similarly, although Krishna plays an important part in the *Mahabharata*, the earliest inscriptions and sculptural pieces found in Mathura between 200 BC and AD 300 do not attest his presence. Because of such difficulties, the ideas of an epic age based on the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* has to be discarded, although in the past it formed a chapter on most survey books on ancient India.
>
> (Sharma 2004: 20–1)

M. Lal ascribes a much greater importance to literary sources. He insists on their historical value even though he mentions the difficulties related to their datation. He also mentions that there is a debate between those who think that ancient Indian literature is religious in nature and those who consider it as having a historical value.

> There has been much debate about the reliability of ancient Indian literature for the history of India. It revolves around the opinion that most of the ancient literature is religious in nature, and those which are claimed to be history by Indians, i.e. puranic and epic literature, contains no definite date for events and kings. A large number of inscriptions, coins and local chronicles do indicate an effort toward history writing. The rudiments of history are preserved in the *Purana*s and epics. We find genealogies of kings and sometimes their achievements. But it is difficult to arrange them in chronological order.
>
> (Lal 2002: 17)

Lal's observations postulate a link between the historical value ascribed to ancient Indian literature and the nationality of the person evaluating it. He seems to think that these texts are valued as historical mainly by Indians. (He presents the debate as opposing Indians who recognize these sources as historical and others, who are not defined but who one assumes to be 'non-Indians', who do not recognize this.)

In general, secular and Hindu nationalist historians strongly disagree on what concerns the historicity of the epics and their datation. Atul Rawat protests against the affirmation made by R.S. Sharma in his textbook according to which '[t]he pauranic tradition could be used to date Rama of Ayodhya around 2000 BC, but diggings and extensive explorations in Ayodhya do not show any settlement around that date' (Sharma 2004: 20). Rawat answers to these doubts:

> Once again the author is using only Archaeology to create doubt about a very sensitive point of history. Elsewhere he had mentioned Rama to be a mythical hero (page 158). But here, he intends to create doubts about both Rama of Ayodhya and *Pauranic* tradition. *Kaliyug* itself started in 3102 BC. Since Rama of Ayodhya was born in *Treta Yug*, the *Pauranic* tradition would date him much before 3102 BC. So this assertion about *Pauranic* tradition itself is wrong. Moreover, in absence of any citation or evidence provided by the author, it is difficult to ascertain, how did he arrive at the 2000 BC date for Rama by the *Pauranic* tradition? Furthermore, after this arbitrary dating of Rama to 2000 BC he tries to demolish it due to lack of archaeological evidence. This is absolutely a dubious method of arguing about history. The question of existence of Rama of Ayodhya is a sensitive point and such an insensitive treatment cannot be in anybody's interest.
>
> (Rawat 2004: 17–18)

The questions linked to the historicity of the god Ram have captured public attention and gave rise to a debate that spilled out of academic circles in the 1980s. This was due to the VHP-led campaign for the 'liberation of Ram's birthplace' that resulted in the destruction of the *Babri Masjid* on 6 December 1992. (Since then, Hindu nationalists have asked for (re)construction of a temple on the site.) The VHP claimed that not only had the mosque been built on Ram's birthplace but also that there was a *temple* on this spot, which had been destroyed in the sixteenth century and replaced by a mosque.[33] According to historians and archaeologists of the Hindu nationalist persuasion, there were abundant proofs from literary and archaeological sources corroborating this version of history.

Secular historians tried to counter the Hindu nationalist narrative by denouncing the fallacious arguments they advanced regarding Ram, Ayodhya and the mosque. They insisted that no evidence could prove that there was once a temple on the site of the mosque, and even less that Ram was born on this particular spot. To sum up, the debate focused on these two questions: first, whether the *Babri Masjid* was built after destroying a temple dedicated to Ram and, second, whether the mosque stands on the deity's birthplace, which implies that Ram is an historical figure and that the *Ramayana* is an historical account.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) conducted a project to find out if there was any evidence of the *Ramayana*'s historicity. B.B. Lal, who was in charge of the 'Archaeology of the Ramayana Sites' project, concluded that the excavations on five sites associated with the epic had provided enough confirmation of its historical basis (Lal 1998 TH; Lal 2003 IT). Yet, these findings are disputed as well as the idea that the present Ayodhya is the same city as the one described in the *Ramayana*. Historians argue that the town now known as Ayodhya was called Saketa until it became the capital of the Gupta dynasty in the fifth century. The king then renamed it Ayodhya to establish a symbolic connection between his rule and the ideal rule of Ram in Ayodhya (Bernbeck and Pollock 1996: 140; van der Veer 1992: 104). Concerning the historicity of the epic, Romila Thapar draws attention to the existence of 'many Ramayanas' with significant differences in the story. The first stories of Ram were not presented as sacred texts but as simple narratives or poetic compositions. Thapar also notes that this question is something new because earlier the historicity of a deity was never an issue (Thapar 1993).

Thus, secular historians opposed Hindu nationalist historiography by pointing out that events belonging to the realm of myth were being passed off as historical.[34] According to many Left-leaning intellectuals, this confusion between myth and history removes all credibility to the Hindu nationalist historiography and makes dialogue impossible. Anjali Modi denounces the unscientific approach of Hindu nationalists in the following terms: '[T]oday as the Sangh Parivar seeks to put its own version of history in place it does not even maintain a pretence of using accepted historical methodology;

it simply calls upon community and religious sentiment to justify action' (Mody 2001b TH).

However, Hindu nationalists maintain that their arguments are scientifically proven, i.e. based on sources. They provide historical evidence in support of their theses, evidence whose validity is questioned by the secularists who accuse them of manipulating their sources, falsifying them, fabricating them or basing their claims on sources that cannot be verified. I will briefly present two examples. They illustrate the 'inevitability' of using the language of the 'science of history' and consequently of referring to source or 'traces'. It is inevitable in the sense that when there were no 'traces' of the past, the Hindu nationalists fabricated them. The first example concerns three stone inscriptions 'discovered' in 1992 following the destruction of the *Babri Masjid*. According to the Hindu nationalists, these inscriptions belonged to the temple that existed on the site before the mosque and whose material components were re-used for building the mosque (Lal 1998). Secular historians alleged that the slabs – on which were the inscriptions – were brought into the enclosure by *kar sevaks* (voluntary workers) after they had destroyed the mosque (see, in particular, Mandal 1993).

The second example is about N. Jha and N.S. Rajaram's discovery. In the summer of 1999, the Indian press announced that a historian and a palaeographer working on the seals found in Harappa had finally unveiled the mystery of this script. N. Jha and N.S. Rajaram,[35] the authors of the discovery, published a book explaining their method and the meaning of the inscriptions they had deciphered (Jha and Rajaram 2000). These inscriptions revealed a frequent occurrence of the term 'horse' and of elements associated with this animal. The book also contains a fuzzy photograph of a seal depicting a horse. Michael Witzel, a professor of Sanskrit, and Steve Farmer, a historian, declared that the discovery was a fraud (Witzel and Farmer 2000 FL). They were of the opinion that the photograph of the seal was manipulated with the help of a computer and that the method of deciphering was so flexible that inscriptions could be made to say anything.

Most of the research done so far shows that horses were not found in India before 2000BC. However, Hindu nationalist historians are bent on proving a much earlier presence because to prove that the Indus Valley civilization and the Vedic civilization are one and the same they need to 'find' horses in Harappa as these animals occupied an important place in rigvedic cultures. The Vedic texts described horse sacrifices and testify to the presence of chariots pulled by horses.

> If Rigvedic culture (normally dated to the last half of the second millennium BCE) is identified with Harappa, it is critical to find evidence of extensive use of domesticated horses in India in the third millennium BCE. In the case of Hindutva 'revisionists' like Rajaram, who push the Rigveda to the fourth or even fifth millennium, the problem is worse. They must find domesticated horses and chariots in South Asia thousands of years before either existed anywhere on the planet.
>
> (Witzel and Farmer 2000: 6 FL)

These two examples show that Hindu nationalist historians are well aware of the necessity to give their narrative the form of academic history to gain recognition. This need for scientificity might be explained by the legitimizing force of history as well as by the obligation today to be categorized as scientific just to be heard (see Nandy 1995). History has become the only recognized way of accessing the past that enjoys 'public' validity.[36] The other means, such as the epics and popular tales and myths, have a validity that is believed to be limited to the private sphere. For this reason, Vinay Lal suggests that

> the very proclivity to argue in the language of the historian shows how far the proponents of Hindutva have abandoned the language of Hinduism for the epistemological imperatives of modernity and nation-state. Nothing resonates as strongly as their desire to strip Hinduism of myth, of its ahistoricist sensibilities, and to impose on the understanding of Hinduism and the Indian past alike the structures of a purportedly scientific history. The Hindutva historians have, in all these matters, embraced the methods of their adversaries: thus nearly every lengthy article pretends to carry with the paraphernalia of scholarship.
>
> (Lal 2005: 261)

However, Lal's argument seems too clear-cut. The Hindu nationalists are active – in parallel – on the 'history' and on the 'myth' fronts.[37] Undeniably, the Hindu nationalist discourse is often located in the realm of history, but it is also sometimes located in the realm of myth and faith, which allows it to receive 'multiple authorisations' and reach varied audiences (Sarkar 2003). It attracts the audience for which the reference to myth serves as a justification as well as the audience for which the reference to history is a factor that attests to the credibility of the narrative (see Bhattacharya 1993: 124–5).

With the questions linked with Ram and Ayodhya, we have seen how the Hindu nationalists 'historicize myths', we will see that they also 'mythologize history' (Udayakumar 2005). On the 'myth front', the secularists are weak and unarmed. When they are drawn in this field, their reply is to try to come back to scientificity.[38] For instance, Ashgar Ali Engineer argued that '[t]he historicity of Ramjanamsthan [Ram's birthplace] seems to be so weak that its proponents resort to faith rather than facts' (Engineer 1990: 7). He was replying to Professor K.S. Lal's argument according to which:

> [i]n religion, it is a matter of faith and not of proof. . . . So by faith and faith alone, Christians embrace Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, by faith and faith alone Muslims believe Muhammad to be the Prophet of Allah, and by faith and faith alone Hindus believe Ramajambhoomi in Ayodhya to be the birth place of Lord Rama. Beliefs of all religions have to be shown equal deference.
>
> (Lal, October 1989, 'Ramjanam Bhoomi – some issues', Org., quoted in Engineer 1990: 7)

Moreover, some advocates of the Hindu nationalist narrative tend to temper the need to follow the rules of science by considering that the *role* of history is, first and foremost, to serve as an *inspiration* and a model for the youth. This is what Ram Swaroop, an influential intellectual belonging to the RSS, argued during an interview:

> History should be presented in an interesting manner. It should be like story-telling. What do you stress upon the student is important [*sic*]. This is the formation stage of a child. History should be used to impress the sense of good and bad in the child. Characters in history become symbols of good and bad. . . . Values can be transmitted only through history. History is teaching by examples. There are heroes and villains. In our history, there is Ram. Lord Ram is seen as a symbol of goodness, righteousness, sacrifice while Ravana is presented as an evil genius. He was learned, he was a scholar, a Brahmin but he was a tyrant. He was licentious. Therefore, Indian tradition worships Ram and condemns Ravana.
>
> (Interview with R. Swaroop, March 2005)

Ram Swaroop began by talking about history and its potential as a storehouse of examples of conduct worthy of emulation. Then he referred to Ram and Ravana that he treats as historical figures. These statements are based on an instrumentalist view of history as a means of transmitting values. Further, the choice of examples (Ram and Ravana) shows that the values to which the discourse refers are seen through the prism of Hinduism even though, strictly speaking, they are not Hindu values.

In the same spirit, the writer of an article published in the *Organiser* under the title ‘Perceptions of History’ declares:

> Indian historiography is concerned with values and unlike European historiography, not with time. It is not material to Indian historiography when Bhishma actually lived. It is obsessed with Bhishma’s character and values he represents and debates are still going on. The same thing can be said about Rama and Krishna. Time of their actions is not very important for us. It is the concept of Ramrajya and the teaching of the Gita that engage interest.
>
> (Desai 1999 Org.)

I believe that the interpretation proposed by Charu Gupta of the *Bharat Mata* temple (inaugurated by Gandhi in 1936 in Banaras) and the images of the ‘incarnated’ motherland it displays on detailed geographical maps also applies to the link established by Hindu nationalists between myth and history.

> It has been argued that the drawing of modern and precise maps was an emblem of the rational and scientific nature of the West, . . . a prelude

> to possession, a tool for enabling mastery of the world. The scientific map became a metonym of colonial modernity. . . . Hindu nationalists, through a detailed and precise mapping of the nation in a temple with the emotive name of Bharat Mata, were able to combine (or hybridise) science with emotion and modernity with traditional belief.
>
> (Gupta 2002: 198–9)

I therefore argue, in accordance with Charu Gupta's interpretation, that Hindu nationalists, by historicizing myths and mythologizing history, combine science (history) with emotion and modernity with tradition. Hindu nationalists claim to offer something more than a mimicry of Western modernity; they claim that their modernity is not uprooted and foreign but indigenous, linked with Hindu tradition, embedded in the country's ancient culture.[39] However, as Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) have shown, traditions are malleable and can even be fabricated. To attain their aim, Hindu nationalists do not simply return to age-old traditions. Customs are revisited and adapted to present needs, new goals are assigned to traditions that are re-actualized (for an example, see Assayag 1998).[40]

History as Bildungsroman of the nation-state

The authors of the Hindu nationalist and secular historiographies depict the present Indian nation as they think that it should be (either secular or Hindu). They project this 'imagined community' through history and focus on what they think are its deep-rooted origins. The representation of the nation as 'it should be' determines the reading of the past, which, in turn, serves as a justification for the conception of the nation. The system operates in a cyclical and auto-referential manner. Both the historiographies adopt a teleological view of history as a process recounting the development of the nation. The historical events are emplotted in the narratives so as to confirm the nation as it should be (on 'narrativization', see Bhattacharya 2008: 65). Hence, the two historiographies can be read as a *Bildungsroman* of the nation (Thiesse 1999: 134). A *Bildungsroman* is a novel that details the development and the building of the personality of a hero through hardships. In the case of national histories, the hero is the nation and we follow its development towards modernity. The path travelled explains the present situation, links the past to the present and defines a moral for the future.

The divergent views about the nation as it should be today lead to different reconstructions of its development. In the narrative, different paths are taken to reach different destinations even though the material available (the interpreted past) is the same. History is thus a narrative with a scenario that moves towards an end, namely the 'nation as it should be'. Each group establishes a direct and necessary link between the past and the boundaries of the present nation. R. Thapar's observations in the *Hindustan Times* are significant as regards the postulated connection between the past, the present and the future:

> Let me begin by asserting that those who do not understand the past, or refuse to understand it, invariably end up by misunderstanding the present and are unable to move forward into the future. We are faced today with the makers of educational policy in the central government who seem not to understand the Indian past.
>
> (Thapar 2001 HT)

This direct tie is conceived in an identical manner by the two camps. The writer of an article in the *Organiser* declares for example: 'To make India strong we have to stimulate the hearts of the people with legitimate pride in our past. This alone will connect the present with the past and inspire the people to carve out a more glorious future' (Vaidya 2004 Org.). Each group defended its version of the past in order to justify its understanding of the present and its projects for the future.

This type of argument recalls to mind the 'triadic structure of nationalist rhetoric', which is built around a glorious past, a degraded present and a utopian future (Levinger and Franklin Lytle 2001). Thanks to this structure, the nationalist historiography provides a justification for the present political project of nationalist movements. The nationalist rhetoric linking the past with the present not only makes it possible to identify the causes of national decline, but also the means of remedying it. It suggests a framework for political action by defining the values that the nation must re-establish to recover its past glory. Moreover, the nationalists draw not only their pride but also their rancour from their representation of history, so that national rivals from the past become enemies of the present. Therefore, *the legitimacy of the national project as well as its inclusive/exclusiveness rests on its historical justification*.

The conflicts that were highlighted or ignored in the NDA textbooks are just the reverse of those in the old textbooks. In the NDA textbooks, conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in Indian history are highlighted while the injustices of the caste system are not mentioned. Hindu nationalists omit the tensions within the group 'as they think it should be'. They place the source of conflict outside the nation as they imagine it. Conflicts implicate the group they want to stigmatize or exclude, i.e. Muslims (and also Christians, generally in connection with British colonization). In doing this, they construct two opposed and watertight entities. The authors of the old textbooks draw attention to the colonial influence on this interpretation of Indian history based on Hindu–Muslim antagonism. Romila Thapar (2004) claims that the Hindu nationalist discourse projects them as the monolithic and uniform religious communities imagined by the *Raj* and treats them as a political reality. She criticizes this discourse as a whole because it conceals the social inequalities between different castes and pays no heed to the question of social empancipation of the most underprivileged castes. The projection of Muslims (and Christians to a lesser extent) as 'Others' diverts attention from the social inequalities within the 'Hindu' group.

However, both historiographies rest on the division of society into religious categories. While one stresses the tensions and the differences, the other insists on similitude, mutual enrichment and the possibility of living together harmoniously. But neither of the two manages to distance itself from this understanding of society in religious terms.[41] The Left, while defending the minorities, does not question this categorization. It sees the Indian nation as made up of Hindus, Muslims and other religious minorities, while for the Hindu nationalists, the Indian nation consists only of Hindus redefined as an inclusive category.[42] Moreover, for the Left, communal conflicts represent the 'absent present' they prefer not to address. This apprehension arises because they use history to define the modern Indian nation in the same way as the Hindu nationalists. Both groups resort to a compression of time by agreeing that the nation's boundaries and the inclusion or exclusion of Muslims depend on the relations between Hindus and Muslims from the eleventh century until independence.

The debate has been commandeered by the categories 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'; by the causality between their roles in the past and their place in the nation today. These two categories acted like magnets, attracting or repelling people from either side without allowing them the freedom to decide for themselves. This is, in fact, what happened in the case of the Muslims: the controversy was about their place in society as determined by the role played by Muslims in Indian history. However, even though they were at the centre of the controversy, they did not actively participate in it. This situation exemplifies the position of the Muslims in Indian politics: there is much talk about 'the Muslims' and they are tossed from side to side, but they have very little 'voice' in the Indian political space.

Secularists argue that Indian nationalism is inclusive, unlike Hindu nationalism, which excludes a part of the population. This argument is repudiated by postmodern intellectuals who retort that though Indian nationalism may certainly be inclusive, it is nevertheless culturally Hindu. This Hindu impregnation – which Srivastava calls 'Hindu contextualism' (1998: 131–2) and Bénéï 'banal Hinduism' (2008: 58) – is omnipresent and became, for this reason, invisible. However, this nearly unnoticed and deeply embedded cultural characteristic, because of its implicit nature, leaves little room for dispute.

Srivastava demonstrates in his study of the Doon School that, despite the displayed and claimed secularism of the school, the liberal Indian discourse has been infiltrated and is therefore limited by the Hindu worldview. For example, the school chose as its emblem the oil-lamp, a symbol that clearly invokes the Hindu devotional ethos (Srivastava 1998: 116).[43] This choice does not mean that there was a conscious desire to invoke the Hindu connotation. On the contrary, this symbol is so ubiquitous that it is no longer noticed. Even institutions known for their secularism (such as the Doon School) unconsciously promote the Hindu symbolic universe and therefore a Hindu interpretation of secularism. The majority is so immersed in Hindu symbols that it is no longer conscious of their religious significance.

Conclusion

Although their narratives differ, both the seccularists and the Hindu nationalists answer the same question (which history for which nation?) and have agreed on the terms of the debate. They both share an identical conception of the textbook as containing information that cannot be questioned; they follow the same system of national thinking; they both see history as an instrument of the nation-state; and they think of society in terms of the same categories. Both camps accepted the same rules and they opposed each other within this framework. These rules could be summarized as follows: the relations between Hindus and Muslims in the past define the status of Muslims in India today. Either the Muslims were cruel invaders and are therefore now excluded from the nation or they were tolerant rulers and are therefore included in the nation. Another variant of the same line of reasoning concerns the origin of the Indo-Aryans: either the Indo-Aryans were the original inhabitants of India and the Indian nation is therefore a Hindu nation, or they were immigrants (in which case they were outsiders like the Muslims) and the Indian nation is therefore not a Hindu nation. Irrespective of the link between the two, the actors in these two groups have not questioned the 'therefore'. They have not proposed that Muslims can be full-fledged Indians today even if they were at one time cruel invaders, unjust to Hindus and destroyed their temples. And vice versa, Hindu nationalists might believe that even if the Muslims did not really destroy temples, they still do not constitute a part of the Indian nation according to their definition. Hence, historical data were used to demonstrate either that 'the concept of national unity as transcending the boundaries of religious communities' is in line with Indian tradition or that 'the many instances of conflict between the communities . . . testify to the existence of different nations in India'. Both groups feel that their position is confirmed by history. 'On both side, the debate over the identity of the Indian nation took on the form of one over the right or wrong interpretation of the past' (Gottlob 2007: 779).

5 Perspectives and silences

The old history textbooks transmit a national history just like their NDA counterparts. However, each narrative conveys a different representation of history, which builds a different nation. But even though the two historical discourses adopt opposing stances when depicting the nation, we cannot ignore the fact that they have developed in the same context, that they are based on the same categories and that they share the same foundational assumptions. In other words, the two discourses fit into the same framework; both secularist and Hindu nationalists are a part of the grand narrative of the nation-state, of modernization and progress, but they propose two different versions of it.

The history narrated by secularists, just like the one narrated by Hindu nationalists, is inevitably fragmentary and even more so as the two narratives are national histories or *Bildungsromane* of the nation-state. They recount the evolution of the nation treated as an entity. The preceding chapters looked at these narratives as nationalist discourses. Henceforth, the study will concentrate on the process of homogenization set in motion by these narratives by analysing the curricula and the history textbooks. I will show how the perspectives adopted in the discourses produce some measure of uniformity and how the silences in these discourses have resulted in the absence of several categories of the population in the representation of history.

Generally speaking, a nationalist discourse has a homogenizing effect because it covers several categories constituting a wider national category and presents all the people grouped together in this manner as sharing common traits that transcend differences of gender, class, caste, region, etc. The representation of a homogeneous people is a fundamental element common to all nationalist discourses. The nation is conceived as an entity bringing together individuals who share a feeling of belonging. As a result, it does not easily admit diversity as this is likely to pose a threat to national unity. It is actually this representation of a homogeneous people that allows one to speak of nationalisms in the plural form and to consider different phenomena as the expression of a general phenomenon (or a common-ism) (Greenfeld 1992: 7). However, even though the people and the nation are *described* as being uniform, they do not become uniform, or they become so only partially. Yet, I am not implying that these nationalizing discourses have no effect on a

particular territory. There is certainly some degree of assimilation with what Smith calls the dominant ethnie (Smith 1991: 39; Kaufmann and Zimmer 2004). In India's case, 'sanskritisation' is a well-documented assimilation process (Srinivas 1991, see below). However, this type of homogenizing discourse tends to ignore a large number of disparities. This is inherent in any nationalist discourse that is based on, and finds its justification in, the unity of the nation. In India, the two discourses that we have analysed seek and construct this homogeneity. They believe that the lack of national unity could lead to the nation's disintegration. That is why the nation must strengthen the bonds between its different elements and reintegrate those that have been left out.

The nationalist discourse creates an internal coherence that symbolically drives a people towards uniformity. This homogenization is the result of a dual process: On the one hand, the nationalist discourse *homogenizes* the population deemed to be part of the nation and thus creates insiders or the 'inside' of the nation, the 'Us/We' to which the discourse refers. Due to this 'artificial' inclusion, some groups or categories of the population lose – through assimilation – their specificity and hence their visibility. The cohesion created and imposed in this manner erases a number of differences and inequalities when moulding *a people*. However, this inclusion does not mean that the different categories enjoy an equal status. The homogeneity created by the discourse conceals the underlying heterogeneity and reduces a number of categories to silence or makes them invisible. On the other hand, the nationalist discourse *differentiates* those who are included in the nation from those who are excluded. It creates the 'outside' of the nation or the outsiders who can be called the 'Others'. Hindu nationalists mainly create a Muslim 'Other' whereas from the secularist viewpoint it is the Hindu nationalist movement that constitutes the 'Other' (see Chapter 4).

The argument in this chapter has been influenced by Apple and Buras who ask the following questions: 'Whose knowledge is of most worth?', then following Gayatri Spivak (1988) 'Who can speak?' and 'How [some] voices are or are not heard?' (Buras and Apple 2006: 1–2). As regards the first question (Whose knowledge is of most worth?), in his book *Ideology and Curriculum* (2004) Apple criticizes the way the curriculum lays greater stress on some aspects and perspectives. While his study deals with educational institutions in the United States, we shall look at the situation in India. As for the second question (Who can speak?), as we have seen in the preceding chapter, from the time of independence right up to the 1990s secular nationalists were the ones who had the right to speak. This is why Hindu nationalists demanded that they should be treated as an oppressed minority. However, the ones whose voices were not heard at all were the Dalits and all the underprivileged castes, as well as the Muslims and women who share the fact of being excluded from the privileged elites. This leads us to the third question (How are some voices heard or not heard?), which is closely related to the first two questions insofar as it is the dominant elites who decide

who will be ‘heard’ and what knowledge will be transmitted through the educational system.

I will try to show in the following pages that if we leave aside the differences in their historiographies, we find that the curricula and textbooks – both the old textbooks and the ones brought out by the NDA – share an approach that is, by and large, upper caste, urban and male. The corollary of this perspective is the under-representation of Dalits, Adivasis, women, peasants and the rural world as a whole. These missing groups could be put under the general head of ‘subaltern’ in line with the perspective developed by the Subaltern Studies. These are the fragments that Gyanendra Pandey talks of – all those who represent ‘minority’ cultures and practices and who are expected to conform to the dominant national culture (Pandey 2006: 18).[1] However, I would prefer to describe them as ‘non-dominant’ considering that, strictly speaking, categories such as women do not constitute a minority.

The absence of these categories is illustrated by analysing the pictures in the textbooks on modern Indian history. I will, therefore, compare the illustrations in the old textbook on modern India by Bipan Chandra with those in the NDA textbook that replaced it, written by Satish Chandra.[2] The study of these pictures aims first at substantiating and illustrating the argument about the perspective contained in the curricula and textbooks and, second, at highlighting the *vision* (in the first sense of the word) of the nation-in-history or the way each historiography represents the nation’s evolution or its immutability.

In the first two series of textbooks, images were included but they were not seen as having intrinsic values or as being important by themselves: the captions are brief and only mention the event or the name of the person(s) they depict with no reference to the source of the picture, its author or date. However, the choice of images is telling and bears consequences: the decision to include an illustration regarding a particular event or person captures the students’ attention and the event or character illustrated acquires visibility and thus more importance in the reader’s eyes. The pictures offer an easier and quicker access than the text and get imprinted faster in the students’ memory (see Levin and Mayer 1993: 96). Moreover, the pictures in the textbooks are relevant not only as illustrations of the text but also for themselves. They draw attention to the parts of the text they illustrate, they ‘talk’ about the text, but they should not be reduced to this. They have a significance of their own; they have their own stories to tell and, as Davis (1999) writes, they have their own lives.

Upper caste perspective and urban imaginary

The curriculum and the textbooks

Several critiques of the 2000 Curriculum have highlighted the casteist distortion that the text suffers from and, to be more precise, the manner – sometimes

devious or indirect – in which it favours the upper castes. This argument was put forward by, among others, Aruna Rathnam, an educationist and activist, and S.P. Udayakumar, a political science scholar who has set up a school in Tamil Nadu. Their critical views convey their social commitment to mitigate the inequalities caused by the caste system. Further, since they both belong to South India, they are certainly more sensitive to the imposition of North Indian culture as the sole culture of the entire country.

According to Udayakumar, the curriculum justifies the reproduction of social inequalities by claiming that it takes into account the diversity of aptitudes. He bases his criticism mainly on the following passage taken from the part of the curriculum entitled 'Education for a Cohesive Society':

> Equality of opportunity means ensuring that every individual receives a suitable education at a pace and through methods adapted to his/her being. Children of the disadvantaged and socially discriminated groups and also those suffering from specific challenges must be paid special attention.
>
> (NCERT 2000: 9)

According to Udayakumar (2001b), this statement could be justified if it would lead to extra attention to the more underprivileged children. Yet, he argues that it actually legitimizes the inequalities caused by the caste system. Udayakumar links up this statement about differentiated treatment with the latter portions of the document related to 'life-skills'[3] and vocational education. According to him, '[a] critical reader would understand that education for "social cohesion" that emphasizes "life-skills" and "the vast unorganized sector of self-employment" points to nothing but *kuladharma*' (*kuladharma* meaning the duties and obligations of each caste).[4] Udayakumar concludes that the curriculum supports social immobility and hence the caste system.

Regarding vocational education, the 2000 Curriculum suggests that children in the primary classes observe a person performing a particular activity and then participate in the work to familiarize themselves with the world of work. The curriculum clarifies that all these activities should be simple and pleasant (NCERT 2000: 71). Considering that child labour is still an acute problem in India, the curriculum's insistence on the need to familiarize students with work situations seems strange.[5] Rathnam also sees in this suggestion an expression of the urban, male and middle-class approach underlining the curriculum:

> In most rural and urban areas, students from lower classes and castes are involved directly or indirectly in their parents' work. It is only in urban middle class surroundings that students are unaware of work situations.
>
> Besides, it brings up another question: for whose benefit are we inculcating values related to work at so early a stage? Is this evidence of the middle class mindset of viewing other people's children as mere 'hands' to be trained, as Myron Weiner pointed out (1994)?
>
> (Rathnam 2000)

Another reproach addressed to the 2000 Curriculum, which also applies to the 1988 Curriculum, is that it does not adopt a critical position with regard to the caste system and untouchability whereas they should be problematized and historicized. In this view, the curriculum and textbooks should present castes as flexible and changeable categories in the course of history.[6] On the contrary, castes – and not just the lower castes but castes as a whole – are almost absent from the history curriculum. This quasi-absence, whether in the curriculum of 1988 or 2000, is reflected downstream in history textbooks. The origin of this absence lies further upstream in the dominant historiography in which the study of questions related with castes and the caste system has been neglected (see below).

Caste is mentioned in the 2000 Curriculum, particularly in the portion related to the strengthening of national identity and the conservation of cultural heritage:

> At no point of time can the school curriculum ignore the inclusion of specific content to forge national identity, a profound sense of patriotism and nationalism tempered with the spirit of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, non-sectarian attitudes, capacity for tolerating differences arising out of caste, religion, ideology, region, language, sex, etc.
>
> (NCERT 2000: 12)

Rathnam wonders what this part of the curriculum means:

> Why should a believer in equality of all humans develop a capacity of tolerating differences arising out of caste? To me, as a teacher and as a citizen, what is to be inculcated with regard to caste is the capacity to express a 'learnt rage', to use the words of the Tamil poet Bharati.
>
> (Rathnam 2000)

It is indeed surprising that the curriculum should call for the development of a capacity to tolerate differences arising out of belonging to a particular caste, differences that are, for the most part, confused with the inequalities caused by the caste system. It seems legitimate to recommend tolerance towards religious practices, but this tolerance does not presuppose a hierarchy based on adherence to a particular religion. Though the idea of tolerating special features associated with belonging to a particular caste can refer to practices followed in everyday life, many of these practices arise out of the perpetuation of the very system that includes the exploitation of the most disadvantaged groups. Therefore, this call to tolerate caste differences supports the system.

The recommendation of tolerance was already present in the 1988 curriculum and was worded in similar terms,[7] only that the 2000 Curriculum refers to a Sanskrit concept (*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*). Sanskrit expressions are frequently used in this document and this has been interpreted as a sign of the North's desire to present Vedic civilization as the sole source of Indian

culture, denying thereby the contributions of South Indian culture: 'Call me a paranoid Dravida, but the Sanskrit quotations here make me uneasy. . . . In fact, the only Indian language from which quotations are drawn is Sanskrit. . . . Is Sanskritic tradition the common heritage the document harps on?' (Rathnam 2000). This opposition between 'Dravidian' and 'Sanskrit' traditions is multidimensional as it is associated with language, region, race and caste. It refers to two of the linguistic families from which present Indian languages are derived. South Indian languages are of Dravidian origin while numerous North Indian languages are derived from Sanskrit.[8] This linguistic distinction has often been equated to belonging to either the Dravidian or the Aryan race and also to different castes. Brahmins are supposed to be the descendants of the Aryans who fought against the Dravidians and defeated them. The Aryans are then supposed to have consolidated their domination through the caste system in which they relegated the Dravidians to the lower castes.

A comparison of the 1988 and 2000 curricula allows us to understand what was new in the 2000 version and what were the changes made by the BJP-led government. Two of the points highlighted by Rathnam and Udayakumar were already present in the 1988 Curriculum in almost identical terms. The first relates to the development of vocational education and the second to tolerance of caste-related differences (see NCERT 1988: 9 and 29). However, unlike the curriculum of 2000, the 1988 document does not glorify the Vedic period. Also, the text prepared in 2000 is generally less coherent than the one from 1998. It contains disjointed passages, especially when dealing with topics related to social structure as we shall see below.

The 2000 Curriculum begins with a longing for a perfect past before the British arrived. It highlights that 'India had an advanced system of education and the world's first universities' and '[a]s per British Documents, even the early nineteenth century India had an extensive education system, free from caste and religious discrimination, and almost all the villages had schools'. It presents an idealized conception of a caste free village: 'The social matrix was congruent with the economic design based on the principle of distributive authority given to each village unit' (NCERT 2000: 1–3).

The following extracts from Curriculum 2000 illustrate the ambiguous position of its authors regarding the caste system. They certainly affirm the need to improve the living conditions of the most underprivileged castes, but before that, they devote two long paragraphs to the loss of traditional values and they deplore the destabilization of the structure of authority in Indian agrarian society:

> A sizeable segment of the contemporary Indian society seems to have distanced itself from the religio-philosophic ethos, the awareness of the social design, and the understanding of the heritage of the past. Influenced by the *alien technological ethos*, the parents and the educational institutions emphasise the acquisition of high grade techno-informative

> knowledge alone. However, the impact of westernisation has been limited to only the elite members of the society, leaving the masses unaware of these developments. . . . In this way, the structure of the authority of the Indian agrarian society *has been disturbed*. An individual in the formal work system could exercise authority over those who were otherwise his superiors in age and in the societal structure. In the agrarian society, successive generations followed the occupation as well as the goal sets of the family or the caste at large.
>
> . . . In contrast to the joint and extended family system, the society now is witnessing the phenomenon of nuclear families, single parents, unmarried relationships and so on. The modern formal work organisations . . . [were] in sharp contrast to the work design of the agrarian society in which individuals by themselves could complete the entire work due to the simplicity and sequentiality of the technology. In the cultural sphere, major changes have been introduced by legislation which seek [*sic*] to abolish social inequalities and exploitation handed down by tradition and accord all democratic rights and constitutional privileges to all the members of society.
>
> It is widely accepted that education, adequate in quality and scale, is the most powerful instrument for achieving goals of action and establishing social cohesion. Some of the important national goals are: secularism, democracy, equality, liberty, fraternity, justice, national integration and patriotism. It should also develop in the child a respect for human rights as well as duties. The weaker sections including scheduled castes/ scheduled tribes, women, children with impairments and minorities can no longer remain underprivileged. Education must contribute to the enormous task of their upliftment and empowerment.
>
> (NCERT 2000: 3–4, emphasis added)

The words and the tone of this passage seem to indicate that its authors regret in some measure the recent changes in social relationships. They describe society before as being autarkical, harmonious and coherent[9] as compared to contemporary society beset by disintegration. There is a perceptible change and a lack of consistency in the tone and the words used in the first two paragraphs and the last. In the final paragraph, the authors affirm – without any apparent connection and without transition – the need to promote equality in society. This incoherence exposes the authors to the accusation of making politically correct statements that sound purely rhetorical even more so because they do not define how equality should be promoted. The quest for equality has often implied Sanskritization, which M.N. Srinivas defined as 'the process by which a "low" Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently "twice-born" caste' (Srinivas 1991: 6). In this case, it might be more exact to speak of reducing inequality through assimilation rather than obtaining an equal status.

For his part, Kancha Ilaiah, a political scientist and social activist, supports the culture of the lower castes and advocates, not Sanskritization, but Dalitization of the nation (Ilaiah 1999a, 2003). He believes that Indian society as a whole should learn a lesson from the way villages and Dalit families are organized. According to Ilaiah the system rests on a very strong collective conscience as a result of which the community takes precedence over the individual, the notion of property is not very strong, life is organized around productive work and there are egalitarian and democratic relations within the community in general and between men and women in particular.

Ilaiah is a Shudra born in a village in Andhra Pradesh in the 1950s. Belonging to the first generation of Dalit and Shudra children going to school, he describes how strange he found what he read in his school textbooks. The language was foreign to him as well as most of the information given in these books.

> Right from early school up to college, our Telugu textbooks were packed with these Hindu stories. For Brahmin-Baniya students these were their childhood stories, very familiar not only in the story form but in the form of the Gods that they worshipped. . . . I distinctly remember how alien all these names appeared to me. Many of the names were not known in my village. The name of Kalidasa was as alien to me as the name of Shakespeare. The only difference was that one appeared in Telugu textbooks while the other appeared in English textbooks. . . . The language of textbooks was not the one that our communities spoke. Even the basic words were different. Textbook Telugu was Brahmin Telugu, whereas we were used to a production-based communicative Telugu. In a word, our alienation from the Telugu textbook was more or less the same as it was from the English textbook in terms of language and content.
>
> (Ilaiah 2003: 13)

Although Ilaiah does not mention the textbooks he is referring to, I may surmise that they were books published in the 1960s by the Andhra Pradesh education board. The perspective of NCERT textbooks (whether the old ones or the NDA textbooks) is not very different from what Ilaiah describes and the referents in these books still appear foreign to a large proportion of Indian students (Kumar 2006).

Hindu nationalists and secularists consider it quite normal that ‘high culture’ be taught in schools and that ‘low cultures’ be disregarded.[10] They think it is their duty to educate the masses living in ignorance and they do not believe the references and the life mentioned by Ilaiah as worthy of being included in ‘teachable’ knowledge. One part of the Left is of the opinion that the masses should be secularized and modernized in order to save them from popular cultures containing a lot of regressive, retrograde and oppressive elements. For this reason, secular nationalists have condemned the new curriculum published in 2005, which reaffirms the importance of local culture in education

(see below). Hindu nationalists, too, believe that education is their mission, but they position themselves on a different terrain from the secularists; they claim to be the champions of traditional or indigenous cultures. They believe that it is their duty to help poor communities and outcasts who are also a part of the Hindu nation but have forgotten their origins and become the victims of missionaries. However, this position reflects a condescending attitude towards Dalits and tribals as well as towards their knowledge. Hindu nationalists do give some importance to this knowledge in their discourse but, in actual practice, it is treated as no more than an aspect of the folklore associated with underdeveloped peoples who, the Hindu nationalists believe, they are finally drawing into the pale of civilization.

The example of Ekal Vidyalayas

The so-called tribal peoples can be described by the generic term *Adivasi*, which means ‘original inhabitant’. Hindu nationalists, who do not want to attribute to these tribal groups the status of original inhabitants, prefer the term *vanvasi* or forest-dwellers. This term evokes primitive traits that Hindu nationalists willingly associate with the peoples that they believe they have to help come out of their backwardness, follow the path of Hinduism and protect from Christian missionaries (Pandey 1993: 258). For this purpose, the *Sangh Parivar* organizes projects for educating Adivasis through several organizations, notably *Ekal Vidyalayas* and *Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams*. These projects provide rudimentary education together with ideological teachings. Children learn to read the names of Hindu gods, they pray to these gods at the beginning of the class and study episodes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.[11]

The *Ekal Vidyalaya* foundation carries out its activities in regions inhabited by tribals, mainly in the north-eastern states of India and the states of Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan. These regions have been the focus of Christian missionaries since the arrival of Europeans in India. To counter this, the *Sangh Parivar* has developed its activities since the 1980s (and organized, among other things, ‘re-conversion’ ceremonies for the tribals). Praveen Togadia, general secretary of the VHP, describes the *Ekal Vidyalayas* as ‘the largest Hindu missionary work in India’ (Togadia 2009 *Org*.). The brochure describing the *Ekal System* mentions that some of its members also belong to other social organizations, such as the VHP, *Ramakrishna Mission*, *Arya Samaj*, RSS or *Vidya Bharati* (Gupta 2004: 74). This list gives an idea of the Hindu nationalist orientation of the movement’s members. Furthermore, the *Ekal Vidyalaya* movement is supported by the RSS, closely linked with the VHP and managed by the *Vidya Bharati* organization.[12]

The main activity of *Ekal Vidyalayas* is to set up ‘one-teacher schools’ in villages where there is no government school. The classes are conducted by a resident of the village who has studied up to the ninth or tenth grade and has then followed 5 to 10 days of teacher training offered by the foundation.

Ekal Vidyalayas provide elementary education, which should, nevertheless, enable their students to join a government school in Class III or IV. When this is not possible, *Ekal Vidyalayas* help their more advanced students to continue their studies by offering them weekly classes.

Children between the ages of five and fifteen attend classes three hours per day, either before or after completing their daily chores. The first 15 minutes are devoted to cleaning and prayers, followed by 30-minute periods that include a language class, an arithmetic class, a general knowledge and basic science class, a class devoted to either drama, handicrafts or indoor games, followed by half an hour of outdoor games or *Yogasanas* and, finally, 10 minutes of songs with the last 5 minutes set aside for prayers.

The first *Ekal Vidyalaya* was opened in 1987 by Madanlal Agarwal in the Tundi Block of Dhanbad district in what is now Jharkhand state. In 1997, Agarwal decided to repeat the experiment in other villages and other states. In 2009, the foundation provided schooling according to its own estimates to nearly 780,000 children in more than 27,000 schools (Ekal Vidyalaya 2009).[13] The funds for running these schools are collected through donations from people living in India and abroad. The Indian diaspora is a major source of funding. The *Ekal Vidyalaya* Foundation has branches outside India principally in the United States, Canada, South Africa, Australia, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong and New Zealand.

The organization was designed to connect cities' repository of development and villages wanting progress. A bond is created by a city-dwelling family sponsoring a child living in a village. Women play a key role in the recruitment of urban families likely to sponsor village children. The system is described as follows:

1 Our objective is to develop emotional attachment of most successful urban families with the poorest among poor families of the society to make society a strong entity.
2 This can only be achieved by ladies of both types of families.
3 So ladies wing will be at central stage in city organisation build up.
4 Any organisation is built through three types of activities:
    1 Family Contact – To make a homogeneous working team
    2 Regular meeting & Programmes – To inculcate habit of sacrificing time for society
    3 Ideological Input – To make firm commitment for the cause.

(Gupta 2004: 32)

To strengthen the link between the city and rural areas, urban families are asked to maintain direct contact, either by courier or by telephone, with the sponsored children. Visits to villages are also encouraged. In a compact video disc entitled *Jagriti* (Awakening) produced by the foundation and distributed

among its donors, the narrator explains that the movement is able to function thanks to the funds contributed by affluent urban families. However, these families do not simply provide financial assistance but also travel to the villages they support:

> Through annual visits to these temples of education, the urban families get to know about life in these villages. Many of these urban families considered this to be a welcome break from the hustle and bustle of city life and enjoy the simple warmth of a rural ambience far from the maddening crowd.
>
> (Retranscription, video *Jagriti* produced by AVL Productions for *Ekal Vidyalaya*)

Donors can decide between several options depending on their interests and the time they wish to devote to this activity: they can just visit a school, or they can visit a school and other projects and spend a night in the village. Then longer programmes are organized such as *Ekal Pleasure*, which includes a sightseeing trip and a visit to a school, or *Ekal Adventure* a 15-day trip notably for children of Indians settled abroad.

Apart from providing education to children living in villages without schools, the foundation aims to reunite the nation by reintegrating rural areas into the national fold. The extract quoted below is from a brochure describing the activities of the Friends of Tribals Society, an organization that cooperates with *Ekal Vidyalayas* for the development of tribal peoples. The brochure valorizes tribal populations in order to motivate donors to contribute generously. The text presents the tribals as a forgotten part of the nation's body and suggests that, precisely for this reason they cannot be allowed to live in isolation and under-developed conditions.

> Why should we care [for the tribal] when we in the cities and towns have our own woes and worries? . . . We have used his jungles, his forest products and his minerals and we have conveniently forgotten the welfare of our flesh and blood who has sustained this nation through thick and thin of history. He has been the strong arm of our motherlnd [*sic*]. He has also provided us with our culture which we proudly call the 'Aranyak samskriti', culture that has been nurtured, developed and sustained in the jungles by our forefathers.
>
> (Friends of Tribals Society s.d.: 2)

This organicist conception of the nation is common in the discourse of the *Ekal Vidyalayas* and in that of the *Sangh Parivar* as a whole (Jaffrelot 2003a: 454–62). It underlies the argument that the developed parts of the nation should help those who are lagging behind. This idea of the organization as a vehicle of development appears very clearly in the commentary of the video *Jagriti*:

> The tribals of village Kopa bypassed by civilisation, they were a group of hunters gatherers living in abject poverty. When the organisers of the Ekal Vidyalaya met them for the first time they were not willing to even communicate. Today, the same community sends their children regularly to school. Changes are evident in the entire life style of the village. The Ekal Vidyalaya has opened up the window of civilisation for the ancient tribal community of Kopa.
>
> (Retranscription, video *Jagriti*)

The success of the *Ekal Vidyalayas* is described through collections of stories brought out in the form of brochures that include accounts detailing the positive effects of the project on these communities. The organization presents its success in weaning the villagers from addiction to alcohol and gambling and improving their hygiene. Further, the organization actively promotes the respect of Hindu values and traditions in rural communities:

> The result of running such vidyalayas is seen in many forms throughout society. The tribals have started abandoning their superstitions and malpractices. Alcohol consumption and other forms of addiction have miraculously come to an end. It is no longer easy to tempt them. Their alertness and rigidness in following traditions, rituals and cultural values is evident. The legal system has also improved because they are aware of their rights and duties towards government sectors. Every year there is a fall in the number of criminal cases being filed.
>
> (Ekal Vidyalaya s.d.: 41)

Most of the stories emphasize the necessity and the impressive results obtained thanks to a dedication to *sewa* or service to society as illustrated in the story ‘The villagers build the road’:

> The sincerity and hard work of Acharya Krishan Chandra Pradhan brought in good results. Change was visible within 4 to 5 months. Small children recited shlokas in Sanskrit, touched their parents’ feet every morning, learnt songs dedicated to the country and learnt many good habits.
>
> (Ekal Vidyalaya s.d.: 35)

Another story, ‘Ekal Vidyalaya in a government school’, illustrates the problems government schools are facing nowadays and the space it leaves for all kinds of private initiatives. It describes the visit of the education minister of Andhra Pradesh, accompanied by the district collector, to a government school in Fargi village. When they enter the classroom, the children sing the *Saraswati Vandana*, *Gayatri Mantra* and patriotic songs. The minister is impressed by the children’s knowledge and discipline. However, once the minister leaves the school premises, the collector tells the teacher that he does not approve of the songs he has taught the children because they are not a part

of the curriculum prescribed by the government and they impart communalist ideas. The teacher replies by asking: 'Is Gayatri Mantra communal? Is it wrong to worship the goddess of knowledge Devi Saraswati?' Only then does he inform the collector that it is not a government school but a school run by *Ekal Vidyalaya*. The collector does not understand as the class is taking place in a building meant to house the government primary school. The teacher tells him:

> [a]s far as the government building is concerned let me tell you sir that your school exists only in papers. Your teacher visits once in a blue moon and seeing the Ekal Vidyalaya he feels satisfied to know that his job is being done by someone else. It is the Gram Samiti [village council] who have [*sic*] permitted us to make use of the building.
>
> (Ekal Vidyalaya s.d.: 38–40)

This story illustrates the state's lack of commitment in the field of education, which allows private denominational schools to spread in areas neglected by the government.

The *Sangh Parivar*'s commitment to education and its attempts to spread it among the tribals is to be understood in reference with the Hindu nationalists' desire to bind to the Hindu nation these areas considered inseparable parts of the nation even if they are located at the margins. Hindu nationalists want to make sure that the tribal populations are firmly tied up to the 'main body' of the nation. Yet they leave them in a marginal position, they do not integrate them as equals even if they recognize the need to improve the living conditions of the lower castes and the tribals (Zavos 2001: 84). Further, the fear of external threat on which the Hindu nationalist discourse is based is exacerbated at the nation's boundaries where Dalits and Adivasis are geographically and symbolically located. In the Hindu nationalist imaginary, Christianity – because of its zeal for evangelization – is the main threat to peoples situated at the periphery of the Hindu nation. In reaction to what the *Sangh Parivar* sees as an unacceptable weakening of the nation, Dalits and Adivasis are pushed by Hindu militant organizations to define themselves as Hindus.[14] According to the *Sangh Parivar*, these people must be made aware of their Hindu identity and protected from the danger of conversion.

Conversions certainly happen, yet the percentage of Christians within the total population of India has been fairly constant over the years: Christians constituted 2.6 per cent of the Indian population in 1971, 2.4 in 1981, 2.3 in 1991, and 2.3 in 2001. The Christian community, according to the 2001 census, numbered 24 million people. In 2004, the Dalit Christian Liberation movement estimated that 70 per cent of Christians in India were Dalit.[15]

For those already Christian, several Hindu nationalist organizations propose, and sometimes violently impose, 're'conversion ceremonies. The *Sangh Parivar* speaks of reconversion as it contends that Adivasis belong to a subordinate group within the caste system and are, as a consequence, originally Hindus. After 're'conversion, they 'gain' the status of Shudras. Adivasis are

thus placed higher in the caste hierarchy than Dalits who are outside the caste system. Chatterji (2009: 306) shows that in Orissa 'post-Hinduization' Adivasis are mobilized against Dalit Christians 'both fomenting Adivasi-Dalit divides and vitiating the historical solidarities between them'. This means that Dalit Christians are doubly discriminated as Dalits and as Christians. Moreover, Dalits who convert to any religion except Hinduism, Sikhism or Buddhism, lose their Scheduled Caste status and cannot benefit any more from the positive discrimination's measures.[16]

The symbolic assimilation of Dalits and Adivasis into Hinduism does not occur without resistance. In the book *Why I Am Not a Hindu* (2003), Ilaiah refuses it. He observes: 'Suddenly, since about 1990 the word "Hindutva" has begun to echo in our ears, day in and day out, as if everyone in India who is not a Muslim, a Christian or a Sikh is a Hindu. Suddenly I am being told that I am a Hindu' (Ilaiah 2003: x). Ilaiah's reaction as a Shudra corresponds to the position of the majority of untouchables who do not consider themselves as a part of the 'Hindu' category. They use this term to designate members of the upper castes.[17] However, the upper castes use the term Hindu as a residual category that includes all those who are not of foreign origin or whose religion was not born in a land other than India (which applies to Muslims and Christians, though the Parsis seem to be an exception (Searle-Chatterjee 1994: 16–17)).

Urban imaginary, 'indigenous' curriculum and local knowledge

The way lower castes and Adivasis are represented is closely related to the way rural areas are perceived by city-dwellers and the opposition between urban and rural areas as seen in the discourse of the *Ekal Vidyalayas*. This discourse is based on two sides of the urban imaginary, namely the opposition between the city (source of civilization) and the countryside (non-civilized) or, to be more precise, between metropolitan cities on the one hand and provincial towns and the countryside on the other.[18] The Adivasis and Dalits, being associated with the countryside, conjure up the notion of underdevelopment. According to this view, villages and their inhabitants are dependent on the city and its dwellers for accessing progress. Civilization is brought by the city, which is synonymous with modernity while the village symbolizes archaism. However, this archaism is also associated with a certain amount of romanticism and considered the storehouse of eternal wisdom and tradition.

This opposition and its ambiguities are reflected in school textbooks. Even though rural India is described in a positive and idyllic light, the point of view remains of an outsider and a city-dweller. Shalini Advani (1996) analyses the textbooks used in Uttar Pradesh and Kerala for teaching English as well as those prepared by NCERT (before the advent of the BJP-led government). In these books, peasants and villagers seem to live in a parallel atemporal and unreal world. 'Discernible beneath the celebration, however, is an anxious acknowledgement of the uneven spread of modernity' (Advani 1996: 2080).

As for the old history textbook on Modern India for Class XII by B. Chandra and the NDA one written by S. Chandra Mittal, though farmers and villagers appear in the texts, they are absent from the iconography. The almost exclusive importance given to the portraits of 'those who made history' leads to the absence of peasants, craftsmen, villagers and others who could be described as subalterns and repositories of what Gellner (1983) calls 'low culture'.

This 'low culture' and what is described as 'local knowledge' finally gained recognition in the 2005 Curriculum. This document recommends that the general lessons in school textbooks should be rooted in the local context:

> The child's community and local environment form the primary context in which learning takes place, and in which knowledge acquires its significance. . . . In this document, we emphasize the significance of contextualising education: of situating learning in the context of the child's world, and of making the boundary between the school and its natural and social environment porous.
>
> (NCERT 2005: 30)

The idea behind the promotion of local knowledge is to impart knowledge that students can associate with familiar elements so that they do not absorb a vast quantity of information without being able to relate it to any experience. But this recognition caused much anxiety and distrust among Left intellectuals who were afraid that the valorization of indigenous cultures would amount to accepting a type of relativism that would leave space for the theories propounded by Hindu nationalists in the field of knowledge.

The criticism of this aspect of the 2005 Curriculum brings to mind the criticism about the promotion of an 'indigenous curriculum' in 2000. K.N. Panikkar expressed concern that the contents of the 2000 Curriculum gave undue importance to the indigenous and celebrated the religious:

> Admittedly, in class societies education is an ideological apparatus of the state and is designed and used for the perpetuation and furtherance of its interests. The ideological apparatuses by their very nature function with considerable finesse, obscuring and universalising partisan interests or imputing cultural or national explanations for their initiatives. All these strategies appear to be at work in foregrounding *a new system of education that uncritically privileges the indigenous and celebrates the religious.* It seeks to displace whatever secular and universal content and outlook the existing system, although with obvious limitations, has managed to incorporate and preserve.
>
> (Panikkar 2002, emphasis added)

As already mentioned, the Left was equally sceptical and apprehensive about the concept of local knowledge expressed in the 2005 Curriculum. It judged its content as largely unscientific, irrational and therefore opposed to progress

(e.g. see Sharma 2005 *People's Democracy*). The comments of many secular critics show that local knowledge would be acceptable only if it remains secondary and marginal. According to Zoya Hasan, professor at JNU and a member of CABE, the promotion of local knowledge is limited by the responsibility of school education to open new vistas for students, to widen their horizons and to impart knowledge that should go beyond the local and everyday experiences. She adds:

> [s]ociety may be viewed as a network of social relations or as a sum of separate identities, and it is the latter perspective that informs the document which talks of adopting the perspective of tribals, Dalits and the other disadvantaged. This is a post-modernist perspective.
>
> (Hasan quoted in Sharma 2005 *People's Democracy*)

Describing this perspective as postmodernist is an implicit criticism that draws on the similarity that many secular writers believe exists between postmodernist and Hindu nationalist arguments (see Chapter 4).

The acceptance of local knowledge as a part of the knowledge imparted in school signifies the end of the monopoly enjoyed by the urban perspective. Giving up the dimension of control, finiteness and limited complexity that characterizes this perspective certainly adds to the concern of some intellectuals. In fact, the insistence on local knowledge fragments the process of textbook production, multiplies the sources of knowledge and puts them in perspective. Following this pattern would lead to the weakening of the actual structure organized around a centre producing knowledge that is subsequently transmitted to rural areas and provincial towns. This decentralization empowers the learners, no matter where they are located, as they become a source of knowledge instead of being reduced to a receptacle. The 2005 Curriculum also empowers teachers by giving them some free space away from the textbook.

Freeing teaching from textbooks and promoting local knowledge indicate a willingness to move away from the knowledge imposed by the centre and opening up other sources of knowledge. This openness contains an unknown factor so far as guaranteeing the quality of teaching is concerned but the 'closed' system has shown its limitations in this regard.

The absence of Dalits and Adivasis from textbooks

According to the 2001 census, Dalits or *Scheduled Castes* account for 16.2 per cent of India's population and Adivasis or *Scheduled tribes* 8.2 per cent (GoI 2001). However, the presence of Dalits in the pictures included in the two textbooks is limited to a single picture of Dr Ambedkar. The same portrait has been reproduced in both textbooks (Figure 5.1).[19] As for Adivasis, they do not appear in any of the illustrations.

Ambedkar has become an inescapable figure of the nationalist pantheon. He is an icon of the Dalit struggle for equality and has been appropriated by



Figure 5.1 Dr B.R. Ambedkar
Source: Illustration from the textbook by Mittal (2003: 232)

the secular as well as Hindu nationalist discourses. However, the Hindu nationalists have an ambivalent position toward Ambedkar. In the early 1980s, they included him in their pantheon of nationalist icons, notably by adding his name (along with Phule's name) in the daily morning prayer of the RSS. The inclusion was supposed to 'recontextualise Ambedkar in a manner which should be acceptable to the upper caste Hindus and at the same time to erase the stamp of being anti-Dalit'. Ambedkar was presented as a Hindu social reformer and as being opposed to Muslims. The aim was to 'unite the Dalits and caste Hindus on a common platform of an anti-Muslim offensive' (Palshikar 2005: 214–16). However, and despite this formal inclusion, many among the *Hindutva* sympathizers remain doubtful about Ambedkar's nationalist credentials, as is exemplified in Shourie's book *Worshipping False Gods* (1997). Shourie singles out in particular that Ambedkar sided with the British as he hoped to receive from them – and their egalitarian values – protection against 'caste Hindus'and that he was in favour of Partition as he considered that inasmuch as Muslims wanted an independent state, Partition became inevitable (on this, see Ambedkar 1975: 360).

However, these are certainly non-hagiographical elements of Ambedkar's biography. As the leader of the 'Untouchables' his life is often presented as follows: Ambedkar was born in 1891 in what is now the state of Maharashtra from parents of the 'untouchable' Mahar caste. His father served in the army, which allowed him to benefit from compulsory schooling for all children (both boys and girls) living in army cantonments. Ambedkar later

joined Elphinstone College in Bombay thanks to financial support from the Maharaja of Baroda. Despite his interest for studying Sanskrit, he was prevented from doing it because of his caste and he obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Persian. Then he went abroad and earned degrees from Columbia University and the London School of Economics. On his return to India, he joined the independence movement. However, his disagreement with Gandhi who was opposed to separate constituencies for Dalits pushed him to concentrate all his forces as the leader of the untouchables. He organized several protests in support of their rights, including the right to enter temples and draw water from public wells. However, in 1947 shortly before independence, Nehru asked Ambedkar to join the first Cabinet of free India as law minister. Ambedkar was also the president of the committee set up at the end of 1946 to draft independent India's Constitution (that came into force in January 1950). This document bans all forms of discrimination, notably against untouchables and women. Unlike Gandhi, Ambedkar was convinced that the caste system could not be separated from Hinduism. After analysing the great religions of the world, he came to the conclusion that conversion to Buddhism was the best way for Dalits to escape the injustices of Hinduism and the caste system. In 1956, shortly before his death, he organized a mass conversion ceremony during which 300,000 to 600,000 untouchables embraced Buddhism (Jaffrelot 2000).[20]

Kancha Ilaiah (1999a) believes that Ambedkar is the embodiment of *Dalitbahujan* nationalism (along with Jyotirao Phule and Periyar), which is distinct from other types of nationalism, namely Hindu nationalism developed by Tilak and Gandhi[21] and the communist Brahmin nationalism professed by P.C. Joshi and S.A. Dange.[22] Ilaiah's position and writings epitomize the Dalits' refusal to be incorporated or absorbed in the opposition between communalism and secularism. Aditya Nigam (2000) explores what this refusal means and she analyses the 'third way' advocated by Dalit intellectuals. She shows that there is a kind of complicity between the two opposites (communalism and secularism) that prevent the emergence of Dalits as distinct agency. The Dalit identity has been subdued by this opposition that is seen as 'superior' or 'elemental'.

Nevertheless, there has been a change in the secular (upper castes) discourse that had aligned itself since independence with 'modernity' and had refused to accept the retrograde categorization based on caste. This discourse changed in the post-Mandal period.[23] Castes, and particularly Dalits, were envisaged as a protection against the spread of the Hindu nationalist movement (because the appeal of the movement at that time was mainly to the upper castes, but this has changed now). A secular potential was then attributed to caste:

> The fact that it was the irreducibility of caste divisions that actually turned out to be the rock against which the project of Hindutva seemed to flounder, made the category of caste respectable. . . . [C]aste was

> backward and retrograde when the hegemony of secular-nationalism was unchallenged; it is radical and secular, now that bad days are here and the need for all kinds of allies is pressing.
>
> (Nigam 2000)

The Dalit movement, however, did not know what to make of this change considering that its position was not in line with the secular–communalist axis. The movement did not want to be absorbed by either of the two categories but it wanted to be recognized as an independent movement.

The appropriation of the political discourse, initially by the opposition between imperialism and colonialism and later by the antagonism between nationalism and communalism, led to the total neglect of the role of castes and the inequalities engendered by the caste system in the course of history. Sumit Sarkar recognizes that the dominant Indian historiography (of which he is a representative) has not taken into account the role played by castes. By doing so, it has followed the strategy adopted by the Congress in dealing with social inequalities that were regarded as divisive factors already before independence (this was also the case with gender-based inequalities) (Sarkar 1996 and 2004: ch. 9). It was admitted that these issues called for urgent social reform, but not as urgent as political freedom or the class struggle. Marxist historiography, which became the alternative to nationalist historiography after independence, suffered from the same blindness and ignored the role played by castes.

The Hindu nationalist doctrine, too, ignored the inequalities caused by the caste system. The way Savarkar defined nationality made the reference to caste irrelevant. In his view, once it was accepted that Hindus were those who recognized India as their fatherland (*pitribhumi*) and their holy land (*punyabhumi*), caste differences (such as fragmentation within Hinduism) lost its importance; according to this definition, the only thing that mattered was belonging to *Bharatvarsha*, the mythical name of the Indian subcontinent (Sarkar 2004: 387).

Sumit Sarkar points out that this historiographical silence on the role of the inequalities engendered by the caste system persists to this day and is found even in works critical of the nation-state, notably the research done by historians of the subaltern school. These writers have not questioned the absolute priority given to the anti-colonial struggle and the implicit affirmation that the definition of politics could be reduced to the opposition between secularism and communalism (Sarkar 1996: 270).

A masculine perspective

In the 2000 Curriculum, the part dealing with 'education for a cohesive society' has a sub-chapter entitled 'education for girls'. This chapter affirms the need to establish gender equality and reminds us that the state has the right to enforce positive discrimination in favour of disadvantaged sections of the

population, of which women are a part. However, one sentence in this paragraph appears somewhat suspect to the attentive reader: 'it will be the most appropriate thing to recognize and nurture the best features of each gender in the best Indian tradition' (NCERT 2000: 9). The paragraph that began by affirming gender equality ends by insisting on the specific roles of each gender.

Hindu and secular nationalists define these roles in ways that are sometimes different. We are going to examine how masculinity and femininity are conceived in the Hindu nationalist and secular discourses.[24]

Gender and Hindu nationalist discourse

The Hindu nationalist discourse is defined by the valorization of masculinity, by a need to re-masculinize men and the nation (Anand 2007). This masculinity is conceived in relation to a particular image of femininity and it shapes, in its turn, a particular kind of femininity.[25] As a consequence of the over-valorization of the masculine, the feminine becomes a foil: women need to be defended and this calls attention to the strength and bravery of men. This duty of protecting women assumes a special significance in the Hindu nationalist discourse, which portrays Muslim men as a threat to Hindu women. Anand demonstrates that the *hindutva* discourse rests on 'anxious masculinities' and 'sexualised stereotyping' mainly towards Muslims (Anand 2007: 258; see also Gupta 2002). Indeed, numerous prejudices associated with the 'Muslim other' bear strong sexual connotations. Muslim men are seen as more virile and sexually more powerful. Here is, for example, what a young VHP activist is reported to have said: 'Muslim men are too sexy because they have a hard foreskin due to circumcision and this is preferred by [Hindu] girls' and this is why 'we need cultured Hindu girls who think of their family and not sex' (quoted in Anand 2007: 260).

The stories of Hindu women raped by Muslim men during Partition are used to justify the violence perpetrated nowadays on women belonging to minority communities, especially Muslim women (Butalia 1995: 76–7). The Hindu nationalist project discursively uses Hindu women to bolster its anti-Muslim agenda. This tendency to present Islam in general, and Muslim men in particular, as a danger to Hindu women is present among all the organizations of the *Sangh Parivar* (see Agarwal 1995; Anand 2005).

The necessity of protecting Hindu women begins with the duty to look after the Hindu nation symbolized by a woman, *Bharat Mata* or Mother India. The metaphor of the mother is not limited to symbolizing the national territory (*Bharat mata*), it is also used in relation to language to symbolize the mother tongue (*matri bhasha*)[26] and it is attached to the cow (*gau mata* – 'mother cow') as symbol of the nourishing mother (on *gau mata*, see Uberoi 2002).

Gupta (2002) analyses the language debate that was conducted in the United Provinces during the 1920s. This study testifies of the complexity and ambiguity as well as contradictions related to the use of feminine symbols for

the purpose of nation-building. Associating language with women served simultaneously to defend or condemn, appropriate or reject an argument or a characteristic. Hindi and Urdu were represented as women – Hindi as a patient and respectable Hindu woman and Urdu as a cruel aristocratic libertine or as a prostitute. Hindu women were not allowed to learn Urdu, which was perceived as an erotic language. Moreover, even though Hindi was identified with a woman and a mother and consequently feminized, its 'gender' needed to be masculinized. The participants in the fifth conference on Hindi literature in Lucknow (*Hindi Sahitya Sammelan*) decided that it was crucial to give preference to the masculine whenever there was any hesitation about the gender of a word. The following argument was advanced during the conference:

> If new words are spoken in the feminine gender, then the masculinity of our speech unnecessarily gets reduced and words signifying femininity get increased. If this continues then Hindi will soon be reduced to a language of women. In Lucknow words like motor and kamiz are used in the feminine gender, which shows the delicate nature of people. However, the days are past when delicacy was the identification of rich people . . . New words . . . must be spoken in the masculine gender now.
>
> (Pancham Hindi Sahitya Sammelan 1928: 31 quoted in Gupta 2002: 213)

During the struggle for independence and in the following years, the metaphor of the nation portrayed as a mother was not a prerogative of Hindu nationalists. The nationalist movement mobilized around India as a symbol of the motherland.[27]

Nowadays, however, the image of *Bharat Mata* is linked with the Hindu nationalist imagery (Uberoi 2002: 195–6). The contemporary iconography of *Bharat Mata* frequently consists of a picture showing in the background the outline of *Akhand Bharat* (undivided India) and in the foreground the Goddess with her *vahana* (or vehicle), the lion. The Hindu nationalists have appropriated and monopolized the symbol of Mother India. This illustration is seen on the back covers of their publications, on widely distributed stickers and on many websites.

The symbolic role of women in Hindu nationalism is accompanied by an ambiguous discourse on women's agency. Women are expected to fulfil their traditional responsibility as mothers but they can also become warriors or soldiers to defend the nation. During the 1980s and 1990s, women's organizations developed and grew in importance within Hindu nationalism. The presence and visibility of women increased in the movement in general and, more specifically, during violent agitations. This has been highlighted concerning the campaign for the 'liberation' of *Ramjanmabhoomi* (Sethi 2002). Women also took part in the riots in Bombay in 1992–93 following the destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya, not only by inciting men to violence but also by directly participating in plunder and killing (Kishwar 1998: ch. 7).

Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara as well as the actions of the *Durga Vahini* have contributed to the spread of the image of a strong and combative Hindu woman.[28]

Yet one should not draw conclusions too quickly from this new visibility: political activism does not automatically lead to emancipation (Kovacs 2004) even if a sense of confidence and empowerment is generally gained from political activity (Bacchetta: 2004, ch. 2; Ciotti 2006; Sarkar 1995: 210). To a large extent, the image of the submissive woman continues to predominate in the Hindu nationalist discourse, '[w]omen are still the productive womb, mothers of heroes' (Sarkar 1995: 193). Women might gain some portion of emancipation, become militants, but only in a particular context and only within the RSS family. They should, above all, maintain their position in society, fulfil their family obligations and remember the primacy of motherhood. The coexistence of activism in the political domain and submission within the family has been described as 'controlled emancipation' (Hansen 1995): women can participate but the possibilities of their involvement are ambiguous and in most cases restricted (they find, however, ways to bypass these limitations, see Bacchetta 2004: ch. 2).

Yet, Hansen points out two exceptions to the limited role assigned to women in the Hindu nationalist movement. Women members of the *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad*, the Hindu nationalist students' organization, have questioned the patriarchal system reigning within the RSS. As regards the *Durga Vahini*, it recruits young women specifically for the purpose of undertaking militant and physically dangerous activities.[29] The Hindu nationalist movement incites men and women (through its various organizations) to take part in violent activities. However, though men's participation is a part of their general duty as protectors, women's participation is generally limited to self-protection. Organizations such as *Rashtriya Sevika Samiti* and *Durga Vahini* train women to handle weapons for their own safety whereas, for example, the *Bajrang Dal* holds its male members responsible for the protection of the entire Hindu nation (Kovacs 2004: 381).

Motherhood is valorized in the Hindu nationalist discourse in its reproductive dimension, implying giving sons to the nation. What is most valorized is not the fact of giving life per se but to allow one's sons to die for the nation. In *Bunch of Thoughts* (1966), Golwalkar wrote that

> [w]hen the five Pandavas went to seek the blessings of their mother Kunti before the commencement of the *Mahabharata* war, she blessed them saying, 'Go ye all to the battle. This is the occasion for which Kshatriya women give birth to sons . . .' Let every mother speak in the same heroic strain to her sons even now.
>
> (Golwalkar 2000: 291 quoted in Banerjee 2005: 80)

The same idea is put forth in a speech from Sadhvi Rithambara in which she refers to Bhagat Singh's mother who was, according to Rithambara, weeping

after her son's execution. Yet, she was not crying because he had been killed, but because she had no more sons to offer to the nation (Sarkar 1995: 188).

Gender and secular nationalist discourse

To begin with, it is important to note here that whereas a lot of research has been undertaken on the symbolical representation of women in the Hindu nationalist movement, there are few similar studies available on the conception of femininity in the secular nationalist narrative. There are, for example, few studies on the image of women transmitted by the discourse of the Congress Party (there are studies on women *in* the Congress Party but none addresses the question from a representational point of view). However, several studies have explored Gandhi's conception of women and their role in the nationalist movement.[30]

These studies suggest that even though Gandhi gave a central part to women in the struggle for independence, their role was limited by his respect for traditions (Bald 2000; Forbes 1996; Katrak 1992; Taneja 2005). Yet, Katrak suggests that, by enjoining men and women to participate in passive resistance, Gandhi feminized the nationalist movement (Katrak 1992: 395).[31] However, women's engagement was, most of the time, restricted to a 'feminine mode of participation' as their political activities took place in the private sphere (Forbes 1996: 123–4). This 'domestic' participation reinforced the movement and allowed an investment on the part of women that corresponded to the traditional structure of society but that also valorized femininity. This language attracted Hindu women and reassured men because Gandhi's position respected Hindu traditions (Katrak 1992: 400).[32]

However, Gandhi had an idealized view of Indian women who were supposed to be moral and religious models following in the footsteps of Sita.[33] This goddess evokes chastity, purity, tenderness, faithfulness, self-sacrifice and suffering. Sita followed her husband into exile for 12 years and was abducted by the demon Ravana who brought her to Lanka. Throughout her captivity, her conduct was irreproachable, yet after being rescued, her fidelity was questioned by Ram. To prove her virtue, she placed herself on a lighted pyre and remained untouched by the flames. This allowed her husband to accept her back at his side.[34]

It would certainly be too narrow to limit the secular representation of women to the figure of Sita and to Gandhi's conception of femininity. Yet, the personification of the ideal woman as Sita, the devoted wife, predates and is much more widely shared among Indians than is Gandhi's thought.[35] According to Sudhir Kakar, the importance and significance of Sita for most Hindus across region, caste, social class, age, sex and education bear witness to the 'power and pervasiveness of the traditional ideal of womanhood' (Kakar 1988: 52). It is nevertheless essential to add that the Sita figure people refer to might have been transformed through several layers of interpretation and appropriation. There are without doubt many Sitas.

The attractiveness of the Sita figure caught Madhu Kishwar's attention in form of a certain incomprehension. She observed that many women she talked to were indeed endorsing Sita as an ideal. Yet, the reasons they gave did not correspond to the understanding of Sita as a 'slavish wife' that Kishwar had. The latter interpreted Sita's behaviour as promoting women as obedient and sacrificing wives. Yet, the women she questioned (and even the men) were very critical of Ram's behaviour towards his wife and saw Sita as a woman 'who refuses to accept her husband's tyranny even while she remains steadfast in her love for him and loyalty to him to the very end'; as a woman 'whose sense of *dharma* is superior to and more awe-inspiring than that of Ram – someone who puts even . . . the most perfect of men – to shame' (Kishwar 1999: 240 and 239).

However, when talking about the representation of women in the secularist discourse, how not to think about the impact of a figure such as Indira Gandhi? She was described as *Devi* (goddess) and she would rather be compared with Durga than with Sita (see Wadley 1977: 124). Moreover, Indira Gandhi placed herself in the role of 'Mother India' and she was easily identified with this trope. According to Rajan (1993: ch. 5), the identification was not so much to the directly religious *Bharat Mata* but, rather, to Mehboob Khan's image of Mother India. In this 1957 film, Mehboob Khan presents the heroic and sacrificing Radha who struggles without giving up even when fate seems to be against her as she loses her cattle, her husband and two of her four sons.

The invisibility of women in school textbooks

A study conducted in the 1980s came to the conclusion that most of the lessons in the textbooks focused only on men (Kalia 1988). The reason for this overrepresentation was not only due to the authors' approach but also to the fact that these books were mainly addressed to boys. They offered them positive representations of masculinity: men held all the prestigious positions and possessed qualities such as strength, courage and intelligence. On the contrary, these books limited the role of women to passive observers or defenceless victims (Kalia 1988, also see Kalia 1980).

Dipta Bhog (2002), who analysed the Hindi textbooks for Classes III, V and VIII used *before* the introduction of the 2000 Curriculum, came to conclusions similar to Kalia's: most of the characters figuring in the lessons are men and the books rarely mention women, who are restricted to the roles of mother and sister. In the books analysed by Bhog, two lessons have biographical accounts of women: one of them is about Rani Lakshmi Bai and the other is about Marie Curie. However, while biographies of 'great men' concentrate on their public success (giving few or no details on their private lives), biographies of 'great women' include stories of their public success as well as their private lives. According to Bhog, this makes these women seem more ordinary while the men, presented only under an exceptional light, appear all the more admirable.

Men are also overrepresented in the illustrations of the old textbook and of the NDA textbook *Modern India* for Class XII.[36] In the old textbook, men alone or in groups figure in 59 out of 84 illustrations while women figure in only nine of them. In three of these illustrations, women are present only because they were married to famous political personalities (Bahadur Shah, Gandhi and Nehru). The text does not give any biographical details. There is also a picture of Madame Bhikaji Cama (1861–1936), a woman who was very active in the independence movement, but her name only appears in a list of revolutionaries who operated from abroad. Another picture shows a *sati*, i.e. a widow immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre. Women are also present in a photograph showing Gandhi with a group of working-class women during his visit to England in 1931.

That leaves only three illustrations of women who are not only the main subjects of the picture but about whom there is some information in the text. These pictures represent Rani Lakshmi Bai, Kadambini Ganguli (1861–1923), who participated actively in the Congress Party's activities during the struggle for independence and was also the first woman who graduated from Calcutta University, and Annie Besant (1847–1933), an Englishwoman who developed the Theosophical Society of India and took an active part in India's freedom struggle.

In the NDA textbook, women appear in three illustrations out of forty-two. They are the subject of these pictures and a brief paragraph explains who they were. These illustrations show Rani Lakshmi Bai, Annie Besant and Rani Gaidinliu. The latter, born in Manipur, joined the freedom struggle movement when she was 13. She was arrested three years later (in 1932) and sentenced to life imprisonment. She was released in 1947.

Both textbooks contain a picture of Lakshmi Bai as well as a picture of Annie Besant. However, I will focus on the two illustrations of the rani and leave aside Annie Besant. This choice can be justified by the different status of these two women in the national imaginary. Annie Besant is well known for her role during the independence movement. She has a place in the pantheon of national heroes but she remains a foreigner whereas Lakshmi Bai is a central national figure. She gave her life for the nation and became a martyr of the independence struggle.

Lakshmi Bai was the Queen of Jhansi in the mid-nineteenth century. Married at the age of eight or nine to a man 40 years older, she became a widow at 18. After the Sepoy Revolt in 1857, she fought against the British with Tantia Tope.[37] She died at the age of 20 while leading her troops against the East India Company. She very quickly became one of the heroine figures of the Mutiny and her name, symbolizing the brave woman warrior, was later used to bolster a variety of causes especially during the independence struggle but also afterwards (see Lebra-Chapman 1986: ch. 11).

A notable use of the rani's name was made by Subhas Chandra Bose. In 1943, he chose her as model for the women's regiment of the Indian National Army, an armed force organized by Indian nationalists. The idea and the goal

of this militia, active between 1942 and 1945, were to overthrow the British with the help of Japan. The 1,500 women who fought between 1943 and 1945 in Burma, Malaysia and Singapore were enlisted in the 'Rani of Jhansi Regiment'. The warrior queen reminiscent of Durga provided Bose with an alternative to the Gandhian non-violent female ideal as represented by Sita (Hills and Silverman 1993: 744). After Bose, the Hindu nationalist movements referred regularly to the warlike woman symbolized by the goddess Durga who wields a sword and tramples underfoot the demon Mahisha (see, in particular, Kovacs 2004).

In the picture in the old textbook (see Figure 5.2), Rani Lakshmi Bai appears on horseback by the side of Tantia Tope. Even if the two characters have their swords up in the air, they have a peaceful expression, slightly smiling at each other. As well, the queen appears a little behind Tantia Tope. This image evokes more a gallant ride than a fight and the swords up appear more like a sign of salute than like a violent gesture.[38]

In comparison, the character depicted in the NDA textbook (see Figure 5.3) looks much more warlike.[39] The appearance of the martial component in this image can be put in parallel with the changes in the iconography of Ram: this illustration echoes the 'new Ram' projected in the contemporary *Sangh*



Rani Lakshmibai and Tantia Tope

Figure 5.2 Rani Lakshmi Bai and Tantia Tope

Source: Illustration from the textbook by Chandra (2004: 116)



Figure 5.3 Rani Lakshmi Bai
Source: Illustration from the textbook by Mittal (2003: 107)

Parivar's iconography. This God was traditionally depicted as a quiet and serene character whereas he appears armed and angry in the Hindu nationalist iconography (Kapur 1993).

The two illustrations that follow (Figures 5.4 and 5.5) are not drawn from the textbooks but from a postcard set sold at the Delhi headquarters of the *Vidya Bharati* organization. These pictures are further examples of the emphasis placed by the *Sangh*'s iconography on warlike characteristics. These two prints are recoloured reproductions of well-known motifs. This representation of Lakshmi Bai dates from the 1950s as documented by Neumayer and Schelberger who reproduce a similar print in their book on India's freedom movement in popular art (2007: 76). Regarding the image of the second postcard, the 'angry Rama' as Pinney calls it, it was first produced by the *Vishva Hindu Parishad* in the late 1980s and it has been since then often copied and reproduced (Pinney 1997: 836).

Thus, the 'martialization' of Rani Lakshmi Bai's representation in the NDA textbook corresponds to the general importance and emphasis put in this textbook – and in the *Sangh*'s discourse in general – on the martial character

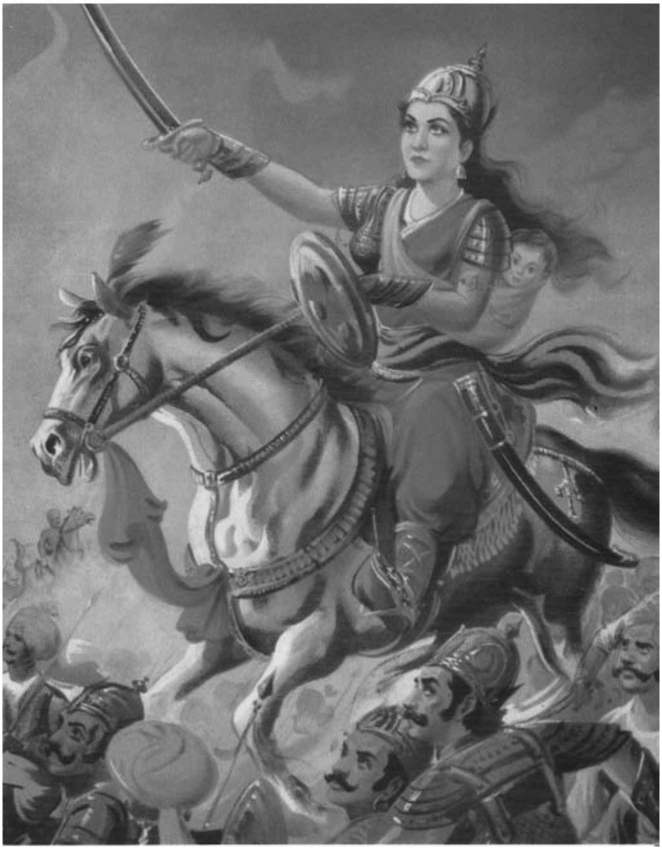


Figure 5.4 Rani Lakshmi Bai riding with an infant on her back
Source: Private collection

necessary to defend the nation. It also reflects the valorization of strength, aggressiveness and fighting spirit promoted even for women by some Hindu nationalist organizations that propose training their female members to fight (see Hansen 1995: 91, Kovacs 2004).

Coming back to the textbooks, as we have seen, most illustrations depict men, which confers a masculine face to national history. The low presence of women does not, however, mean that they are absent from the national imagination. This *visual* absence corresponds rather to the confinement of women to the private sphere where their existence is considered as synonymous with motherhood.[40] The few women represented in these books are seen as exceptions. This is shared by both Hindu and secular nationalists. In this respect, these two visual discourses confirm a feature that is common in nationalist discourses: men embody strength; they have to fight in order to defend the nation (symbolized by a woman) and its women.[41] In the national

imagination, women represent the nation's mothers as well as its vulnerable citizens in need of protection. In other words, men *constitute* or *shape* the nation while women *symbolize* it (Sharp 1996).[42]

Therefore, apart from their differences regarding the conception of the Indian nation and its history, Hindu and secular nationalists confer a similar status to women in their respective iconographies. They imagine nations in which men are active in the realm of politics and in public life while women, without being absent, are most of the time confined to the private sphere where they take care of their husbands and their sons and appear but rarely in the public sphere. It is not my contention that women do not play a role in the construction of the nation, on the contrary, but rather that their role (as actor and not as symbol) has less visibility than the men's 'public' role. This echoes the by now classical argument of the gendered public/private domains[43] even if these space should be seen as interdependent, interconnected and functioning in an 'intricate relationship' (Bénéï 2008: 128). It particularly resonates with Partha Chatterjee's analysis of the symbolic identification of women during colonial times with the 'inner' essence of the community. According to Chatterjee, the distinction between Home and the World acquired a new meaning in India in



Figure 5.5 Angry Ram
Source: Private collection

the nineteenth century, different from the typical conception of gender roles in a patriarchal society, and that allowed protecting the spiritual world represented by women whereas the material world was exposed to westernization (Chatterjee 1989).

It is necessary to add here that male predominance and the presence of gender-related stereotypes in school textbooks is not particular to India. As a matter of fact and in spite of the development of *gender history* (see Bock 1989) and the increased attention paid to the representation (and construction) of gender in textbooks in general and in history textbooks in particular, the imbalances and stereotypes persist in the textbooks of numerous countries.[44] The underrepresentation of women cannot however be explained either by the type of history or by the unavailability of women's pictures. Regarding the first point, some explanations advanced that the type of political, diplomatic and military history that was narrated in these books could not include women because they were either excluded or rarely involved in this type of activities (Trecker 1971). However, other studies have shown that even in areas where the presence of women is well documented, they do not appear in textbooks (Repoussi 2005). Regarding the second point and the question of the availability of illustrations, it is certain that pictures reflect the pre-eminence of men in society throughout history. However, women are present, on paintings and later on photographs, but they are to be looked for in the background of these images. This 'secondary' presence provides, nevertheless, easily accessible visual resources.

Despite the persistence of the unequal representation of men and women in textbooks, there is since the 1970s a growing awareness of gender prejudices. Increasing attention has been dedicated to their removal from school material in most European and North American countries as well as in India. What is surprising is to find the same imbalance, which was quite normal in textbooks from the 1970s, in the NDA books written at the beginning of the twenty-first century. However, the authors of the textbooks prepared on the basis of the 2005 Curriculum paid special attention to eliminate prejudices from their books, notably gender-related ones.[45]

Representing the nation-in-history

The textbooks' illustrations remain the basis of the analysis in this section. They are looked at as *national iconography*, that is to say as the visible symbols of the nations.[46] The national flag, certain monuments and historical personalities form a part of this iconography (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Geographical maps are also a central component of it as they provide representations of the national territory (Anderson 1999: ch. 10). However, pictures in general – when they depict places – can be taken as representation of the national territory. They make it possible to fix an historical narrative in a particular territory. Pictures not only help to *visually construct* the nation but they also contribute to its *geographical rooting*. Anthony Smith (1997) calls this

process, which links a landscape, a particular environment and a community, the 'territorialization of memory'. A nation is linked with a territory that, in its turn, is linked with the nation. Thus, the illustrations in history textbooks make it possible to fix the 'nation's roots' both in history and in land. They work together in this manner to create the nation. The illustrations in the textbooks graphically reproduce the idea of the nation and hence contribute to the construction of the national imaginary.

Proto-nation versus nation-in-the-making

I have compared the illustrations in the old textbooks and their NDA counterparts prescribed for the higher secondary level (Classes XI and XII). During these two years students use four textbooks. In Class XI, they study ancient and medieval India and during their final year they cover modern India and the contemporary period. There is a textbook for each of these subjects. The choice of illustrations in the textbooks will shed light on the divergent conceptions of the nations on which secular and Hindu nationalists base their discourses. The way Hindu nationalists imagine the nation corresponds to what can be called a proto-nation.[47] Their representation of the nation-in-history takes the shape of a body or a national essence that was bestowed upon the nation from the very beginning. This body has lived through the ages and Hindu nationalists believe that it is necessary to protect its integrity. This conception comes through in the preface of Mittal's textbook on modern India for Class XII: 'History is a grand continuum. It is a process that maintains a subliminal continuity despite overt changes' (Mittal 2003). The comment made by the late Pramod Mahajan, formerly general secretary of the BJP, regarding Gandhi's place and role in the nation is equally significant in this respect. Pointing out that Gandhi could be considered an eminent son of India (*suputra*) but not the father of the nation (*rashtra pita*), Mahajan says, '[a] country which is over 5,000 years old doesn't need a father' (quoted in Kanungo 2003: 216–17, fn. 49).

Secular nationalists, on the other hand, reject the idea of a proto-nation. They defend an interpretation of Indian historical developments as reflecting a nation that is still under construction. This nation's roots go far back in time but the nation continues to evolve. This conception, though more open, is not free from the idea of a particular essence that, thanks to permanent identifiers, makes it possible to envisage 'the nation' even if it is still in the process of being built.

Sumit Sarkar describes the search for national unity among the secular Indian nationalists and the temptation to find it and locate it in Hinduism:

> It has often seemed important for even the most secular of Indian nationalists to derive sustenance and authenticity from images of subcontinental unity (or at least 'unity-in-diversity') extending back into a supposedly glorious past. As, except for brief periods of 'imperial unity' (often excessively valorized), this is difficult to substantiate at the political level, the tendency has remained strong to assume some kind of cultural or

> civilizational integration as the ultimate foundation of nationalism. And then it becomes difficult – even for a Nehru writing his Discovery of India – to resist the further slide towards assuming that that unity, after all, has been primarily Hindu (and upper-caste, often north-Indian Hindu at that). The slide was made easier by the undeniable fact that the bulk of the leading cadres of the nationalist and even Left movements has come from Hindu upper-caste backgrounds.
>
> (Sarkar 2004: 363)

That is why Sumit Sarkar believes that the distinction between Indian nationalism (which I call secular nationalism) and the *Hindutva* movement, that he supports in theory and considers *logically* defensible, becomes blurred in practice.

Representing continuity

The main difference between the illustrations in the two textbooks on ancient India (the old one written by R.S. Sharma and the NDA textbook by Makkhan Lal) is the addition in the NDA textbook of pictures drawing attention to the similarity of present customs with those followed in ancient India. These pictures indicate the desire to establish continuity between the primeval and the contemporary nation. Lal thus devotes himself to the task of bringing the past into the present. One example is the attempt to establish a parallel between contemporary practices and those followed by people in the Mesolithic age:

> In the context of modern India we know that even today for about 2–3 months in the lean agricultural seasons every year, the landless labourers, tribal people and poor people survive, at least partly, by foraging for edible roots, leaves, seeds and fruits which grow naturally in the countryside. The Mesolithic way of life in India is still far more important to us than we are willing to admit.
>
> (Lal 2002: 47)

Pictures are used to reinforce the impression of continuity. The textbook contains, for example, the photograph of a terracotta model of a Harappan bullock-cart and the text suggests that the carts used nowadays are the same (Lal 2002: 73). Two other photographs show terracotta figurines, one with its palms joined together in a sign of greeting (*namaskar mudra*) and the other with vermillion in the parting of the hair. The author here establishes the similarity of these gestures with what people do even today (Lal 2002: 90). The text makes explicit and reinforces the construction of permanence conveyed by the visual elements:

> Some of the religious practices of the Harappan people are followed by the modern Hindus. Worship of pipal trees, bull, Siva-lingas is seen in the

> Harappan civilization. The kamandalu which is seen in the modern days as one of the most auspicious possessions of asetics [*sic*], is also found in the Harappan civilization. A large number of figurines in various yogic postures have also been found. Some terracotta figurines of women found at Nausharo still have vermillion in their hair-parting. This is the most precious and sacred symbol of married Hindu women.
>
> (Lal 2002: 90–1)

The need to establish not only continuity but also similarity between customs followed in ancient India (or in the Mesolithic age) and those followed today is in line with the concept of a proto-nation. This vision is based on the similarity between the culture that existed when the nation supposedly originated and present customs and usages. The archaeologist B.B. Lal develops this idea in his book *The Saraswati Flows On: The Continuity of Indian Culture* (2002). Makkhan Lal provided many of the photographs for this book, which certainly served as an inspiration when he wrote the textbook on ancient India. Many of the illustrations are to be found in both books.

The last chapter of B.B. Lal's book is constructed in a way that puts emphasis on the continuity of Indian culture. The photographs are arranged in groups of two: the first photograph shows an object belonging to the Harappan civilization and the second a person in a contemporary situation and/or an object used today. These illustrations are used to 'prove' the theory of the continuity of Indian culture from the Harappan civilization to the present time. B.B. Lal points out the similarity between ornaments, make-up and toiletries, games, cooking and other utensils, agriculture, water management, religion and the social hierarchy. Particularly in the case of religion, Lal claims that the excavations in Kalibangan and the discovery of a terracotta *Shiva linga* prove the presence of Shiva worship during the third millennium BC (Lal 2002: 118). The presence of Shiva worship in the big cities of the Indus Valley would support the Hindu nationalist thesis that this, and that of the Vedic people, were but one civilization. The distinction between these two cultures could only be the result of an error of interpretation.

The immutability assumed by B.B. Lal contradicts the argument advanced by the secularists that India has benefited from a large number of external influences that have contributed to the nation's present form. Lal concludes his book by recognizing the existence of what he calls 'cross-fertilization with other cultures' but adds that despite this Indian civilization did not lose its identity.

> Even Time (Kala), the great devourer, has stood testimony to the fact that the deep foundations of Indian culture could not be shaken either by internal upheavals, howsoever great may have been their magnitude on the Richter scale, or by the infiltrating extra-territorial cultural waves, howsoever super-cyclonic may have been their thrust.
>
> (Lal 2002: 136)

Secular nationalist historians also draw attention to the continuity between ancient India and the present 'nation', but they insist that it is only a partial continuity. This partial nature distinguishes the continuity as envisaged by secular nationalists from the one assumed by Hindu nationalists. Partial continuity does not exclude the recognition of external inputs, which are even emphasized by the secular historians who describe the nation as being still in the process of evolution. Nevertheless, this development is taking place around a pre-existing and recognizable body.

In this regard, a comparison of the treatment of the Iranian and Macedonian invasions in the two textbooks is quite revealing. In the old textbook, Sharma devotes a short chapter to the topic entitled 'Iranian and Macedonian invasions' in which he mentions briefly the influence of these encounters on the local population and culture. With reference to Alexander the Great's campaign, he writes:

> Alexander's invasion provided the first occasion when ancient Europe came into close contact with ancient India. It produced important results. The Indian campaign of Alexander was a triumphant success . . . The most important outcome of this invasion was the establishment of direct contact between India and Greece in different fields . . . Although we hear of some Greeks living in the north-west even before the invasion of Alexander, the invasion led to the establishment of more Greek settlements in this area. . . .
>
> By destroying the power of petty states in north-west India, Alexander's invasion paved the way for the expansion of the Maurya empire in that area. According to the tradition Chandragupta Maurya, who founded the Maurya empire, had seen something of the working of the military machine of Alexander and had acquired some knowledge which helped him in destroying the power of the Nandas.
>
> (Sharma 2004: 110–11)

Lal recounts the same episode in the chapter 'Mahajanapadas to Nandas'.[48] By grouping together the Iranian and Macedonian invasions under the term 'foreign invasions' and not including them in the title of the chapter, Lal reduces their importance. Furthermore, he describes Alexander the Great's campaign in India as a total failure that had no impact on the people:

> The invasion of Alexander the Great has been recorded in minute details by the Greek historians who naturally felt elated at the triumphant progress of their hero. It is a great puzzle that why [*sic*] Indian tradition should have remained silent over such an event. Was it because Alexander only touched the Western border of the then India and returned without leaving any lasting impact on Indian people. His campaign can hardly be called a great military success as the only military achievement to his credit was the conquest of petty ganasanghas and small states. The exertions he

> and his army had to make against Porus, the ruler of a small state, do not certainly favour the hypothesis that he could have faced the might of Nandas with ease. Further, whatever little he could conquer in this campaign was lost within three months of his departure, as most of the conquered areas asserted their independence.
>
> (Lal 2002: 122–3)

The difference between Sharma's and Lal's presentation and interpretation is quite striking. These divergences correspond to the valorization of external inputs in secular historiography and their systematic minimization in Hindu nationalist historiography.

A similar tendency is seen when comparing the textbooks on medieval India for Class XI (the old textbook written by Satish Chandra and the NDA textbook by Meenakshi Jain) regarding the treatment of the arrival of Muslims in India and the growth of Muslim power. The major portion of S. Chandra's textbook deals with the Muslim dynasties in India, their functioning and political, economic and social organization. M. Jain also describes them but gives much more importance than Chandra to Hindu dynasties (see Rosser 2003). She insists on the continuity and persistence of the Hindu proto-nation even during the 'Muslim period'.

This difference in approach is reflected in the illustrations in the two textbooks. Both books contain mainly photographs of monuments showing the sources of political or religious power such as Hindu temples, tombs of Muslim emperors or sultans and forts. Of the 34 illustrations in Chandra's textbooks, 26 evoke the power wielded by Muslims in India (they represent, for example, coins from the Delhi Sultanate or tombs of Mughal emperors). In Jain's textbook, only 26 out of 47 pictures are connected with Islam.[49] Thus, out of the total number of illustrations in the two books, M. Jain's textbook contains more than twice the number of pictures of Hindu temples as compared to S. Chandra's textbook, their respective ratios being one to three and one to seven. The illustrations in Jain's textbook reflect a greater emphasis on Hindu elements and on the continuity of the Hindu nation and its relative imperviousness to external influences.

In the textbooks on medieval India, the presence of Muslims is represented in an abstract manner, almost exclusively through monuments. This presence becomes more incarnated in the textbooks on modern India through illustrations depicting people.

Representing Muslims

The textbooks on modern India contain a certain number of illustrations representing Muslims: 16 out of 84 in the old textbook and 5 out of 42 in the NDA textbook. Out of the 16 illustrations in the old textbook mentioned above, apart from those showing Mughal emperors and Nawabs, six show Muslim leaders who cooperated with the Congress or who were close to its ideology:

Badruddin Tyabji (1844–1906) who became the president of the Congress Party in 1887. Convinced that the Congress was working for the advancement of India as a whole, he corresponded regularly with Muslim leaders opposed to the Congress, especially Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (whose picture figures in the NDA textbook). Hasrat Mohani (1878–1951) was an Indian nationalist who took an active part in the *swadeshi* movement. Moreover, he was opposed to the Muslim League's plan for the creation of Pakistan. Saifuddin Kitchlew (1878–1951) became general secretary of the All India Congress Committee. He was against the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan and later opposed Partition. Mohamed Ali (1878–1931) was a key figure in the organization of the movement in support of the Caliphate.[50] Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890–1998) was the organizer and leader of the Khudai Khidmatgar (Servants of God) Party in the North-West Frontier Province. This party allied itself with the Congress. Sheikh Abdullah (1905–82) was considered one of the most eminent politicians of Kashmir during the independence movement. Claiming to be a secularist, he changed his party's name from *Muslim Conference* to *National Conference* so as to draw members from all communities. He was a fierce opponent of the two-nation theory.

The old textbook also contain one picture of Ashfaqulla and one of Mohamed Ali Jinnah: Ashfaqulla was a member of an armed revolutionary group established in 1924. The government arrested and put on trial several members of the group (the Kakori Conspiracy Case) 17 of whom were given long prison sentences, four were given life sentences and four, including Ashfaqulla, were sentenced to death. Mohamed Ali Jinnah (1876–1948) joined the Congress in 1896 and then left it in 1913 to join the Muslim League. He later became an advocate of the two-nation theory and supported the demand for the creation of Pakistan. After Partition, he became the first Governor General of the newly formed country. As I have pointed out earlier (Chapter 2), Jinnah plays the role of a villain in the secular nationalist narrative. The photograph reproduced in the textbook was taken in 1940 during the Lahore session of the Muslim League. The members present at this meeting adopted an official declaration demanding the creation of an independent Muslim state.

The photographs of Ashfaqulla and Jinnah are also reproduced in the NDA textbook along with two pictures of Mughal emperors and a picture of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. In this book, there are relatively few pictures of Muslims – only five – and of these two are of Muslim leaders who supported non-cooperation with Hindus. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Jinnah believed that the Congress did not sincerely defend the interests of Muslims and that the latter should therefore have their own movement (and, according to Jinnah, their own nation-state).

It must be pointed out that the old textbook contains a picture of Badruddin Tyabji while the NDA textbook has a picture of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. The former, a Congress member, defended this party as the representative of the different communities' shared interests while the latter was opposed to the Congress. Therefore, the illustrations in the old textbook show Muslims who

cooperated with the Congress in the struggle for independence whereas these character are not depicted in the NDA textbook. The latter contains illustrations of Muslim personalities who opposed the Congress and did not believe that it was possible to build a nation bringing together Hindus and Muslims. The pictures in the old textbook, by drawing the reader's attention to the Muslims who believed in the idea of a secular nation-state and supported it, conveyed the idea that Muslims are a part of the Indian nation and want to participate in its construction. On the contrary, the pictures in the NDA textbook show Muslims who positioned themselves as being outside the Hindu proto-nation.

Representing the independence struggle

The distinction between the proto-nation envisaged by Hindu nationalists and the nation-in-the-making envisioned by secular nationalists is also relevant with regard to the difference in the illustrations in the two textbooks on modern India (the old textbook by Bipan Chandra and the NDA textbook by Satish Chandra Mittal). A comparison of the pictures in the two books reveals their partially different pantheons. Some personalities who were not depicted in the old textbook find a place in the illustrations of the NDA textbooks while others disappear. The figures of reference of the Hindu nationalist discourse – Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Swami Vivekananda – are among the newcomers.

However, some of the heroes are common to both textbooks, particularly Gandhi and Nehru. The old textbook has four illustrations related to Gandhi (if we include the reproduction of the article about his assassination), and four of Nehru. In the NDA textbook, which has about half as many illustrations as Chandra's book, there is only one picture of Gandhi and two of Nehru. The persons who figure in the iconography of both the textbooks, like Gandhi and Nehru, are the 'unavoidables' shared by both the secularist and Hindu nationalist pantheons of national heroes. However, Hindu nationalists remain ambivalent regarding Gandhi and very critical concerning Nehru, but the importance of these leaders in the history of modern India makes it difficult not to include them. The fact that one of the two pictures of Nehru is a photograph showing him by the side of Jinnah is not innocuous. This gives the impression that Nehru 'was on the side' of Pakistan's founder or pro-Muslim, as Devendra Swaroop said during an interview in January 2005. Swaroop, a historian and RSS ideologue, admires Gandhi because he is the nation's spiritual father but holds Nehru responsible for India's woes. He feels that the latter was too westernized to understand his country. Swaroop, therefore, thinks that Nehru was not a patriot, unlike Subhas Chandra Bose and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel who he describes as 'patriots par excellence'.

In both the old and NDA textbooks the pictures are unequally divided between the various chapters. In the old textbook, the part on the struggle for independence (1927–47) contains more than a quarter of the illustrations of

the textbook (22 out of a total of 84), while the NDA textbook lays less stress on this period and the role played by the Congress party.[51] The period of 'social awakening' is found in both books, but there is no illustration relating to it in Chandra's book whereas it merits five pictures in Mittal's book. In the latter, greater attention is also paid to violent and revolutionary activities.

The profusion of illustrations concerning the struggle for independence in the old textbook can be explained by the centrality of this period for the secular nationalist narrative (see Chapter 2). In this perspective, the Congress is the principal architect of the independence struggle and of national unity. The old textbooks treat the Congress Party's secular nationalism as the creator of the nation-state and the defender of unity and national emancipation against the exploitative forces of colonialism and the divisive factor represented by Hindu nationalism. In contrast, and unlike secular nationalists, Hindu nationalists cannot give a central place to the struggle for independence in their historiography. The Hindu nationalist movement (represented at that time by the RSS and the *Hindu Mahasabha*) did not take part in the landmark events of the freedom struggle organized by the Congress Party. It did not join either in the civil disobedience movement of 1940–41 or the 1942 Quit India movement (Kanungo 2003: 52). Therefore, the *Hindutva* narrative lays greater stress on nineteenth-century religious reform movements, which it considers closer to its ideology.[52]

The groups who took to armed resistance also receive special attention in Mittal's book. This author devotes two and a half chapters to the role played by revolutionaries and their offensive activities. In 'Some major armed uprisings', he describes the violent activities against the British during the second half of the nineteenth century. He traces the emergence of the Wahabi and Kuka movements. He also talks of the Santhal rebellion during which members of the Santhal tribe got together an armed force to attack the British. Finally, Mittal mentions Vasudeo Balwant Phadke who organized groups of armed rebels (Mittal 2003: 132–9). In another chapter entitled 'Revolutionary movements', Mittal describes the revolutionary activities for the nation's liberation in Maharashtra (the 'sacrifice of the Chapekar brothers' (1879) and the 'activities of the Savarkar brothers'), Bengal, Punjab and Delhi as well as the revolutionary activities organized overseas (Mittal 2003: 183–92). And finally, in 'Mahatma Gandhi, national movement and revolutionary activities', he presents the Kakori conspiracy case (1925) in which Ram Prasad Bismil, Rajendra Lahiri, Roshan Singh, Ashfaquallah Khan and Chandra Shekhar Azad were implicated. Mittal pursues and writes about the 8 April 1929 Delhi Central Assembly bomb blast perpetrated by Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt as well as about the raids organized by revolutionaries in Bengal and the Naga revolt in the north-east (Mittal 2003: 206–22).

The emphasis put on 'armed uprisings' and 'revolutionary activities' is in consonance with the Hindu nationalist ideology according to which militants should defend the nation at any cost and use violent means whenever necessary

(Bhatt and Mukta 2000: 427). If these deeds end in death, the fighters are then revered as martyrs who gave their life for the national cause.[53] The focus on martial activities corresponds to the Hindu nationalist representation of the nation: the nation is not 'in-the-making', it is already constituted and needs to be defended. Hindu nationalists often express the opinion that their community is caught in a warlike situation that justifies actions unacceptable in times of peace (Agarwal 1995: 32; also see Kovacs 2004).

Chandra devotes no more than a few paragraphs to 'revolutionary nationalism', which he also calls 'revolutionary terrorism'.[54] Chandra's use of this term provoked the indignation of Hindu nationalists even if his presentation is far from being one-sidedly critical as we can see in the two passages quoted below.

> But the revolutionary young men did not try to generate a mass revolution. Instead, they decided to copy the methods of the Irish terrorists and the Russian Nihilists, that is, to assassinate unpopular officials. A beginning had been made in this direction when, in 1897, the Chapekar brothers assassinated two unpopular British officials at Poona. In 1904, V. D. Savarkar had organized the *Abhinava Bharat*, a secret society of revolutionaries. After 1905, several newspapers had begun to advocate revolutionary terrorism. The *Sandhya* and the *Yugantar* in Bengal and the *Kal* in Maharashtra were the most prominent among them. . . .
>
> Terrorism too gradually petered out. In fact, terrorism as a political weapon was bound to fail. It could not mobilise the masses; in fact it had no base among the people. But the terrorists did make a valuable contribution to the growth of nationalism in India. As a historian has put it, 'they gave us back the pride of our manhood'. Because of their heroism, the terrorists became immensely popular among their compatriots even though most of the politically conscious people did not agree with their political approach.
>
> (Chandra 2004: 199–201)

Nevertheless, Devendra Swaroop found unacceptable that 'great patriots like Lokmanya Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Hardyal, Khudi Ram Bose could be termed as terrorists by any present Indian historians' and also that their methods be compared with those of 'Irish terrorists' and 'Russian nihilists' (Swaroop 2006 Org.). According to Swaroop, the revolutionary movement constitutes one of the most glorious and inspiring moments in the struggle for freedom.

Despite their differences, the secularist and the Hindu nationalist narratives come to an end, though imperfectly from the viewpoint of Hindu nationalists, with the birth of an independent Indian state. In the old textbook, the history of modern India stops at this date. On page 270 India gains independence and the story ends on page 273, after mentioning briefly the movement of population between India and Pakistan and the accompanying violence, as well as Gandhi's assassination and the drafting of the Constitution.

The creation of the two independent states of India and Pakistan and the accompanying carnage would have deviated from the main story of the establishment of a secular and democratic nation-state. Chandra mentions these events, but he does not allow them to deflect the reader's attention from the main plot of his story.[55] The textbook ends with the following sentence: 'With confidence in their capacity and their will to succeed, the people of India now set out to change the face of their country and to build a just and good society and a secular, democratic and egalitarian India' (Chandra 2004: 273). The 'end of Indian history' in 1947 is significant in the context of constructing a national history. Once the nation-state comes into existence, the secular nationalist narrative comes to an end. According to the secular nationalists, Indians fought for their independence as a nation under construction. Having gained independence, the nation was realized. It had passed from the stage of a nation-in-the-making to that of a nation-state. I would like to add, however, that it was not astonishing that these textbooks written in the 1970s stopped their narrative in 1947. The 1950s and 1960s were simply too close to find their way into 'history'.

In the Hindu nationalist narrative, although independence was a crucial stage, the duty to protect and revitalize the nation continued after 1947. Therefore, Mittal's textbook contains one more chapter after the one on Partition. This last chapter deals with the framing of the Constitution, the accession of the princely states to the Indian Union, Hindu–Muslim riots, as well as the problem of refugees and, finally, economic problems. The textbook ends with the liberation of Pondicherry and Goa. However, the proto-nation's realization in a nation-state is still imperfect especially because '[e]ven today, about a third of Kashmir territory remains illegally occupied by Pakistan, which it calls as *Azad* Kashmir' (Mittal 2003: 261).

The *Themes in Indian History – Part III* (2007), the last of the UPA history textbooks for Class XII also ends with 'The framing of the India Constitution'. However, the Class XII students can learn about the post-independence period in their political science textbook (*Politics in India since Independence*). This book includes discussion about the Emergency, the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984, the *Babri Masjid* demolition and the Gujarat violence in 2002 (on the reluctance with which this textbook was received, see Chapter 3).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that the two narratives, despite their differences, recount a national history that treats the Indian population as a homogeneous entity. Its diversity and heterogeneous traits find little space in these discourses. This has been amplified by the fact that these two conflicting visions acted like black holes, swallowing all other issues in the opposition between secular and Hindu nationalism. The position of women, peasants, Dalits and Adivasis and their views on the nation and history have not been recognized or taken into account although they represent distinctive positions

with their own stands. Their history has nevertheless been reconstructed and defended by historians of the Subaltern school, by feminists, Dalit intellectuals or other concerned historians receptive to these narratives. These intellectuals set out to highlight the specific character of these histories compared with the official national historiography.[56]

Several recent projects by NGOs have emphasized the textbooks' shortcomings. For instance, the NGO Nirantar (a Centre for Gender and Education) conducted research on how textbooks 'construct and convey ideas about femininity and masculinity' and, more generally, on the way the textbooks 'exclude/invisibilise not just women but other collectivities' (Nirantar 2009). This was done for textbooks used in Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi.

Another study by Anveshi, a research centre for women's studies, highlighted that textbooks and children's books in general contain a standardized and stereotypical conception of children and childhood, a mainly middle-class and upper-caste conception. As a consequence, these books 'do not take into account the lived worlds of a vast number of children, from variously marginalized and non-middle class populations' (Srinivas 2007). Starting from these observations, Anveshi collected folktales, songs and stories told, for instance, in Dalit families, tribal villages or non-stereotypical middle-class settings. The project's aim was to elaborate alternative material that would reflect the experience of children from 'marginal' groups. The book series that resulted from this initiative is called *Different Tales* and it proposes other perspectives than the states' and NCERT textbooks.

The third set of textbooks as synthesis

In the preceding pages, I have shown the interactions and the movement that took place between the secular and Hindu nationalist narratives on history, what opposed these two narratives and where they met. The movement could be said to be dialectical, comprising a thesis (the Leftist view suggesting a common harmonious past bringing together Hindus and Muslims) that was replaced by an antithesis (the Hindu nationalist view that constructs a 'common past' during which Hindus and Muslims opposed each other), which was followed by a synthesis (the textbooks elaborated after 2004 proposed a different – as far as possible non-partisan – approach to history).

When the UPA coalition won the elections, it did not act in a hurry to change the textbooks. First, the textbooks introduced by the NDA were reviewed and they remained in use until a new curriculum and new syllabi and textbooks were prepared. According to the Left, the whole process took far too long (see Chapter 3). However, this was the time the NCERT needed (under the chairmanship of Krishna Kumar) to operate fundamental changes.

First, the curriculum elaborated in 2005 proposes ways to avoid over-reliance on textbooks, not to limit knowledge to the textbooks' content and to re-empower teachers and students. Moreover, the position paper of the

National Focus group on Teaching of Social Sciences speaks of an 'epistemological shift in reorienting/redesigning the curriculum so as to accommodate the multiple ways of imagining the Indian nation' (NCERT 2006: 3). This change implies for the secondary stage, that 'contemporary India will be discussed from the multiple perspective including the perspectives of the adivasi, dalit and other disenfranchised populations, and effort should be made to relate the content as much as possible to the children's everyday lives' (NCERT 2006: 7).

Neeladri Bhattacharya, the chief advisor for the new history textbooks, acknowledges that the old textbooks were a 'narrative of the nation' in which '[t]he idea of the unity of India was projected back into the past and history was read as a gradual unfolding of the nation'. He explains that in designing the third set of textbooks they tried to problematize the nation and its unfolding in the historical narrative in several ways to suggest that 'the territorial boundaries of the nation state need not be the only valid unit of historical study'. This was done by changing the focus of the narrative, shifting its focal point away from the nation. The textbooks first zero in on localities with the aim of emphasizing that different communities 'have specific histories that cannot be encapsulated within the story of the nation'. Then, the focus broadens, looking at histories of larger entities. Here, the move is from the national to the transnational by relating 'how different people, different communities and classes, and different regions have participated in the making of the modern world as it is today'. Moreover, the textbooks also distanced themselves from the nation as a unit of analysis by turning to the history of everyday life (Bhattacharya 2009: 106–7).

The focus is different but the tone and procedure of the narrative has also changed. The first two sets of textbooks adopted an authoritative tone (Chapter 2). What was in the textbooks was history and students had to learn about the facts, dates, events and characters that composed their past. The third set of books presents a more open-ended narrative where students can position themselves. The emphasis was put on the social function of the teaching of history: to mould independent-minded and perceptive individuals and to encourage them to develop their intellectual faculties by exercising them freely.

However, the nation remains central to the preoccupations of education as can be seen in the position paper: 'In order to achieve balancing between national and local, it is necessary to incorporate the local perceptions through which the people can relate themselves to the nation. Doing this will also ensure a much deeper and richer understanding of the nation' (NCERT 2006: 3). But it is possible and desirable to have a denationalized education? Maybe not, it depends on what the nation is made to mean.

General conclusion

This book has explored the history textbook controversy and its paradox: the limited use of the NCERT textbooks and the extent and the virulence of the debate. These two elements would seem difficult to reconcile if we were to restrict the causes of the controversy to the pedagogical and historiographical concerns of the protagonists. The textbook debate occupied, indeed, a significant place in political and academic discussions in India for several years, even though the offending books were read, according to some estimates, by barely 10 per cent of the school-going population. This book has aimed at demonstrating that through this debate it was two conceptions of Indian history and of the Indian nation that opposed each other. It has shown *how* these representations opposed each other, what were the arguments used by each side and in which way each group conceptualized the link between history, nation and state. Moreover, beyond these oppositions, this study also intended to point at the convergences between these conflicting discourses.

During the 1998–2004 controversy, neither the encounter between the two camps, nor the points of view expressed, were new. The two competing groups re-presented and redeveloped their 'classical' arguments.[1] However, the redeployment studied here offered a privileged space of analysis to reconstruct each position and to observe how historiography, the nation-state and the education system interact.

I have studied the issue of nation-building in a postcolonial state through the education system and analysed the production and transmission of institutionalized knowledge. I would like to elaborate some more here on the specific definition of the political domain in India. Aditya Nigam suggests that this definition has been shaped and restricted first by the antagonism between colonialism and nationalism, and later by the antagonism between secularism and communalism. All other issues were subordinated to this opposition (Nigam 2000; S. Sarkar 2004: ch. 9). The struggle for independence determined this order of priorities since all other 'causes' were secondary to the goal of attaining freedom from colonialism. However, once independence had been gained, national unity took precedence over all other matters and politics was defined by the opposing principles of secularism and communalism. This opposition overshadowed the strains within various categories of the Indian

population. It is responsible for the neglect of other sources of tension, rupture and social inequalities. The interests of underprivileged castes, Muslims and women were submerged within this antagonism.

Generally speaking, a frame of understanding based on a pair of categories constructed in opposition (secularism and communalism in this case) leads to ignoring the existence of internal differences. The resulting homogenization of each category and the problems it poses were highlighted by scholars in regard to feminist studies. They drew attention to the necessity to recognize the heterogeneity within a particular category, 'women' in the following quotation:

> As critical interventions led by black, third-world and/or lesbian feminists have rightly pointed out, insistence on a universal category such as 'woman', based on a single axis of identification/signification, occludes the simultaneous workings of other axes such as race, class or sexuality (to name a few), that necessarily inflect one's experience of gender oppression or privilege.
>
> (M. Sarkar 2004: 321)

Therefore, what I propose to call the *diversity absorption phenomenon* follows any type of analysis and politics orbiting around two poles or based on the opposition between two categories. Each claims to be all-encompassing and makes it difficult or impossible for the political domain to reflect the complex web of allegiances. The claims to comprehensiveness tend to homogenize society to the detriment of groups that deem themselves to be distinct from either of the two poles. However, this homogenization also provokes a reaction in the form of a discourse based on difference, which makes it possible to regain some diversity.

In May 2007during a ceremony commemorating the events of 1857 – the 'Sepoy Mutiny' for British historiography and the 'First War of Independence' for nationalist historiography – the then President of India, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, contended that the Indian political system should evolve towards a two-party system. He believed this change to be necessary because of the problems raised in the current system that obliged parties to come together in unstable coalitions. Further, Kalam continued, the need to form alliances gave undue importance to political parties controlling only a small number of seats in the *Lok Sabha*.

The editorial writer of the *Organiser* (2007a) was favourable to this idea: 'The evolution of a two-party system is not a chimera. India has two distinct ideological poles, represented by the BJP and the Congress. The parties attached to these poles have a broad agreement on ideological format.' By supporting a two-party system consisting of the BJP and the Congress, the *Sangh Parivar* was declaring itself in favour of a system that would institutionalize the opposition between secularism and communalism. By

doing so, not only would it guarantee its place in the political structure but also eliminate complex allegiance-based relationships and other competing views on politics and the nation that are becoming increasingly popular.

As a matter of fact, the absentees of the two dominant discourses have reacted to their assimilation in this dichotomy. Not wanting to be engulfed in the dominant discourse, the members of these traditionally deprived social categories began to organize themselves and gained political visibility and power through their display of resistance.

Taking this into account, there are at present three main competing representations of the Indian nation-state. The first is the unitary view of the nation that was supported by Nehru, the second is the conception of India as a Hindu nation, which gained in strength during the 1990s although it has receded after its two electoral defeats in 2004 and 2009. For the third position it is necessary to speak in the plural as it groups together many different views advocated by 'underprivileged people'. There are as many third positions as there are groups advocating them.[2] What the Dalits, other lower castes, Muslims and women, had in common was that they were excluded from the privileged elite who enjoyed the advantages of power and state patronage. They soon formed their own political parties or participated in the development of parties at the regional and national level. These parties might not have a coherent view of what the Indian nation should be, but they conceive a different practice of Indian nationality. They might not be concerned about being secular or not, but their programme generally opposes elitism and centralization.

How do these categories of the population, which had little or no voice until quite recently, envisage the nation? Have they developed a strictly nationalist discourse or, rather, a counter-narrative that does not necessarily refer to the nation? Answering these questions would require a deeper study of these specific discourses, which was not the object of this book. I would, nevertheless, point out that the homogenization process that is at work in the construction of the national identity is being repeated within the categories. Each of these discourses (nationalist, feminist, Dalit, etc.) is the expression of a perspective containing a claim to universalization that Radhakrishnan (1992) describes as '"particular-universal" ideologies'. While none of these partial discourses is sufficiently legitimate to represent the entire social body, each of them claims to sum up this totality precisely through the opposition to its 'Other' (Radhakrishnan 1992: 81). Each of these categories contains a homogenizing discourse as well as one or more counter-discourses demanding recognition of the complexities and specificities of each group. For instance, as has often been noted, within the categories 'Dalit' and 'women', the position of Dalit women is unique and the difficulties present at this junction are fully recognized neither by the Dalit movement (its leaders believe that the women's issue 'is an instrument of division to weaken the movement and disregard caste in favour of gender') nor by women's movements (Namala

2002: 363; see also Rao 2003). The claim of the All-India Backward Muslim Morcha (AIBMM) is another counter-discourse deconstructing the 'Muslim' category as a homogeneous whole. The AIBMM points out the existence of caste distinctions among Muslims and contends, for this reason, that there is a separate Dalit Muslim identity that is different from the traditional discourse of 'upper-caste' Muslim leaders who pretend to speak for the entire community. These leaders accuse the AIBMM of trying to create divisions by introducing casteism and thus providing a handle to Hindu militants. Moreover, traditional Muslim leaders claim that the division of the Muslim community into castes is 'anti-Islamic' (Sikand 2004: 112–13).

As we have seen, homogenizing discourses do not correspond to effectively homogeneous groups. It is the same with the kind of perfect antagonism that was constructed during the controversy. The debate was often presented as an opposition between a liberal and civilized Us and an authoritarian (even fascist) and barbaric Other. It took the form of a siege where modernity was beset by obscurantism and barbarism. This brings us back to Gita Hariharan's novel *In Times of Siege* (2003), which illustrates well this conception of the controversy.

However, even if the situation of 'perfect' antagonism is illlusory, the illusion of clarity adds to the strength of the antagonism and amplifies it. Yet, its permanence and its perpetuation are not without consequence to the extent that this opposition has acted for a long time like a black hole, swallowing the other issues around it. Consequently, it has gained in importance and limited the field of political possibilities. It has prevented the diversification of perspectives that constitute the political field.

In this view, we can understand why the controversy assumed such proportions. The textbooks offered a favourable terrain for the launching of a new 'siege'. The adversaries had previously confronted each other on several occasions but this time their roles were reversed. The former assailants had now become rulers. Furthermore, through historiography, the debate touched on the very basics of their positions, on their ontology. Each camp moved up to the front, sensing an opportunity to prove the validity of its position. The major issue was once again constructed around, and therefore reduced to, these two poles. Those who pointed out that the importance of history textbooks should not be restricted to an opposition between a secular and a Hindu nationalist perspective were sidelined. The two camps got fully involved in the campaign that continued even after 2004 when the NCERT tried to leave this antagonism behind by giving, first and foremost, a pedagogical orientation to its work.

The historians who took part in the textbook debate were defending a particular idea of the Indian nation-state. This does not imply that all historical writing should be equated with a purely nationalist discourse but it highlights the difficulty (maybe the impossibility) of extracting oneself from the frame of the nation-state. However, there are different degrees of involvement. The

conclusions Mary Fulbrook arrives at when comparing the works of historians belonging to the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany are relevant to our analysis as well. She writes:

> while historiography of both East and West Germany was politically coloured, there are differences in the degree, character and extent of this coloration. It is oversimplistic to assume that 'political bias' is simply a matter of grotesque distortion, sins of commission and omission, in the blatant interest of a dictatorial state. There are various levels at which the question of 'political coloration' must be addressed, if we are to develop a more differentiated view.
>
> (Fulbrook 1999: 218)

It is, therefore, necessary to recognize the diversity of the historical national narratives – ranging from slightly ideologically tinted to completely coloured – within the two camps that we have identified.

I would like to come back briefly to the difficult question of the impact or the influence of these narratives: what is certain is that historians cannot create nations simply through their narratives. In order to inculcate a certain idea of a nation in the people, much more is needed than abstruse history books, or even well-written books meant for a wider readership. In fact, national identities are built and institutionalized through a wide range of factors including collective memory, first-hand experiences and a sense of common destiny. Further, historical consciousness, which is but one element of national identity, is never based only – and sometimes not at all – on the writings of professional historians. Nowadays, films may have a greater and more lasting impact on the representation of an historical event than the works of several generations of historians.[3] The end of East Germany and the Soviet Union showed the limitations of the inculcation of a national identity through the intense use of history for political ends.

However, this observation does not imply that the contribution of historians through their writings and their participation in the elaboration of textbooks has no effect and that the textbooks remain without impact on students using them. These books certainly contribute to the students' representation of history but they contain one narrative whose influence might be either reinforced or diminished by what students hear from other sources (family, films, friends, etc.).

This research was about a 'centralizing' project and, therefore, I would like to reintroduce or re-emphasize the plurality of the education system of which we might have lost sight while focusing on the Centre's discourse (how the Union government portrays the nation in its official discourse transmitted through school textbooks). How is this discourse received in the different states of the Indian Union? Since the State Boards prepare their own textbooks, they can reintroduce a certain amount of heterogeneity in the national narrative (see

Bénéï 2001, 2008; Vernoff 1992). This opens another avenue for research that could deal with issues related to the adaptation of the nationalist narrative (through the history of India as recounted in the textbooks) by the different regions: to what extent do the State Boards adapt national history to the specific context and history of their region; or how are these homogenizing discourses relayed, transmitted and accepted by the states?[4] These modified narratives might provide off-centre perspectives and alternative narratives.

Notes

Introduction

1 The BJP's participation in the government and its position as leader of the NDA brought about several changes in the formulation and pursuit of public policies (for an assessment of the changes, see Adeney 2005; Mitra 2005; Ruparelia 2006). This was the third time that the BJP participated in the federal government. In 1975, the earlier 'incarnation' of the BJP (called *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* – BJS) was a part of the *Janata Party* which won the elections but could remain in office only for 30 months. In 1996, the BJP led the government for just two weeks and was obliged to step down as it could not establish a majority in Parliament. In 1998, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won the election but one of its allies decided to quit the coalition. New elections had to be organized in 1999. The NDA received a majority of votes and was able to remain an entire term in office.

2 The saffron colour is associated with Hinduism and it is often used to symbolize Hindu nationalism.

3 The accusation is based on the comparison of the BJP's actions with the behaviour of Islamic fundamentalist organizations. The comparison also links the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya by Hindu nationalist activists in December 1992 with the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan by the Taliban in March 2001 (see Muralidharan 2001 FL).

4 Lord Macaulay is the author of the 'Minute on Indian Education' (1835, reproduced in Carter and Harlow 2003). This document had a considerable influence on British education policies in India. Macaulay defended the introduction of an education system conducted in English and copied from the British model. He suggested that this type of education was necessary for the empire to produce the clerks it needed: 'We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.'

5 The concept of grand narrative refers to a type of meta-narration which assumes not only that there is a link between events but also that the development of these events makes sense and leads toward progress (Lyotard 1979). However, the way leading to progress and what progress means differ from one narrative to another. The most widespread grand narratives are the Marxist narrative about the triumph of socialism and the working class, the liberal narrative about the progress of democracy and capitalism and, located somewhere between these two, the social democratic narrative about capitalist transformation (Ross 1995: 667–8).

6 According to the philosopher of history Frank R. Ankersmit, historical writings are precisely representations of the past and not descriptions, interpretations or explanations. Ankersmit develops the implications of the idea of historical representation by comparing it with representations in the field of art (especially

painting and photography) as well as with political representation (Ankersmit 2001, esp. chs 1 and 2).

7 For a long time, people belonging to the 'lowest' castes were grouped together as pariahs, *depressed castes* or untouchables. The *Government of India Act*, 1935 and the Indian Constitution of 1950 categorized them as *Scheduled Castes*. Gandhi called them *Harijans* or 'Children of God'. Many of them are still called, and also call themselves, by their specific caste name (Chamar, Jatav, Pasi Namasudra, Mahar, etc.) and a term often used now is Dalit, which means downtrodden or oppressed.

8 On the violence caused or organized by Hindu nationalists, see Mathur 2008 and Chatterji 2009.

9 Berti (2007) illustrates the difficulty of differentiating between what is to be attributed to the Hindu nationalist ideology and what is not. Her work on the RSS's project of writing local history sheds light on a process in which supporters of Hindu nationalism and actors motivated by other concerns participate. But the observer runs the risk of amalgamating all the participants as Hindu nationalists.

10 All government schools in the Union Territory of Delhi are affiliated to the CBSE and, as a consequence, use the NCERT textbooks.

11 This was the case in Gujarat, Orissa and Rajasthan.

12 Under the Indian Constitution, competences are shared between the central government and/or the states' governments. The subjects are divided up into three lists: the Union List containing the subjects entirely controlled by the Union government, the State List containing the subjects under state government control and the Concurrent List containing the shared competencies of the central and state governments. Until 1976, school education figured in the State List. The 42nd amendment included it in the Concurrent List.

13 The report of the National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation (1994) notes that the states of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh follow the history curriculum and textbooks prepared by NCERT after subjecting them to some modifications.

14 Ahonen (1992, 2001) studies the changes introduced in the history curriculum in the late 1980s and early 1990 in Estonia and in East Germany; Füredi (1992) compares controversies in England, Germany and Japan; Kuzio (2005) analyses the debate on the representation of history in Ukraine following the break-up of the USSR; Loewen's (1995) study deals with history textbooks in the United States; Phillips (1998) describes the debate on the curriculum during the 1990s in Great Britain; Tsai (2002) looks at the reforms in Taiwan; as for the textbooks used in Israel and Palestine and the way in which each of these countries is depicted by its neighbour, see Pina 2005 and Podeh 2000. About the Japanese textbooks and the protests they provoked in China and South Korea, see Barnard 2003 and Nelson 2002.

15 The designation of a section of the population as tribal is a legacy of colonization. These groups were classified and listed under the category of *Scheduled Tribes*. Since independence, this status has entitled them to the benefits of positive discrimination in the form of reserved seats in state-funded educational institutions as well as quotas in government jobs. It is, nevertheless, difficult to define the tribe as a social group and distinguish it from other groups, especially those belonging to the lower castes, because of the cultural exchanges between them over a very long time (Béteille 1998).

1 Nation, religion and history

1 See Umut Özkirimli's highly critical article on Smith's treatment of the postmodernist literature published in 2003 in *Nations and Nationalism* and Smith's

reply in the same issue (Smith 2003). See Walker (2001) on the different types of postmodernism and their relationship with the study of nationalism.

2 On constructivism, see Berger and Luckmann 1967 and Searle 1995; for an application to the study of nationalism, see among others Brown 2001, Fearon and Laitin 2000, and Tilley 1997.

3 Brubaker argues that they should be conceived as categories of practice or even as 'cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organizational routines, institutional forms, political projects and contingent events' (2002: 167)

4 There are different definitions of the concept of 'group' depending mainly on the proximity required between its members (see Capozza and Volpato 1999: 14).

5 Andreas Wimmer's conceptualization of culture as 'cultural compromise' is helpful here. He defines it as follows: 'Culture could be defined as an open and unstable process of negotiating meaning, which has cognitively competent individuals of differing interests and aims relating to one another, and which, in the finding of accepted compromises, leads to social closure and corresponding cultural boundary-making' (Wimmer 2002: 34).

6 On the emotional component of nationalism, see also Bénéï 2008.

7 The discourse of a movement is subject to change: it may refer to the same symbolic resources but 'speak' of them differently over time (Zimmer 2003) or it may stress other themes, depending on the political expediency.

8 There is a vast body of literature on the question of the revitalization of religion. See, among others, Bruce 2003; Casanova 1994; Juergensmeyer 1993; Kepel 1993; Lawrence 1995; Riesebrodt 1998; Sahliyeh 1990; Tétreault and Denemark 2004; Thomas 2000; Zeidan 2003.

9 Different authors evaluate diversely the importance of the above mentioned factors. See, for example, Biswas 2004; Igwara 1995; Juergensmeyer 1990, 1993; Marty and Appleby 1994: intro.; Sahliyeh 1990; Thomas 2000: 817–18; Voll 1992; Zeidan 2003.

10 See Campbell 1999; Juergensmeyer 1993; Kakar 1996b: ch. 8; Pasha 2004; Sahliyed 1990; Thomas 2000. It is necessary to note here that this type of analysis, which locates religious nationalism mainly in Third World countries and explains it as a rejection of the western model, underestimates the importance of religious nationalism in the West, especially in the United States (Tétreault and Denemark 2004: 1).

11 This dichotomy was first developed by Meinecke 1917 and Kohn 1945. It was later taken up by Smith 1991, Brubaker 1992, Greenfeld 1992 and Schnapper 1994 (to mention only a few scholars who have used this distinction). Its validity and implications have been discussed at length (see, in particular, Brown 1999 and Zimmer 2003).

12 This link has often been conceptualized differently for the East and for the West. See van der Veer and Lehmann (1999) for a critical analysis of the dichotomy between a secular West and religious East.

13 Adeney and Lall (2005) show how the territorial view of nationality traditionally upheld by the Congress and the ethnic view advocated by the BJP explain the changes in policies related to the rights of the Indian diaspora. Nehru, who supported the territorial concept of nationality, announced after independence that the Indians who were abroad and chose to remain there would not be granted Indian citizenship. During the 1990s, the Congress Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, remained faithful to the territorial concept of nationality and refused to introduce dual nationality for Indians living abroad. The BJP, on the contrary, recognized this right in keeping with its ethnic view of national identity, even though this decision was also motivated by the economic interests represented by the diaspora.

14 Prakash Chandra Upadhyaya (1992: 817) argues that this conception of secularism is partially inherited from colonialism:

> secularism was redefined in a uniquely Indian way. It was not taken to mean the separation of religion from politics, and the attenuation of community-based political identities. Instead, it took on board the British view of India as a communally compartmentalized society, but whereas the British chose to believe that India's communities could never work together as part of a single political system, Indian secularism promoted the ideal of cooperation and unity among India's community.

15 See Nandy 1988, 1989 and Madan 1987, 1989; See also Pandey 2006: ch. 8 for a critical assessment of secularism, but for reasons other than those put forward by Nandy *et al*.
16 For critical evaluations (based on different approaches) of the arguments put forward by Nandy and Madan, see Baber 2006 and Nanda 2003: 55–64. A book edited by Rajeev Bhargava (1998b) brings together some of the most important contributions to the debate.
17 The preamble of the Indian Constitution adopted in 1950 defined India as a 'sovereign democratic republic'. The adjectives 'socialist' and 'secular' were added after the 42nd amendment was passed in 1976 during the State of Emergency.
18 Gopalan Balachandran (1996: 81–111) points out that, right from its birth in 1885, through campaigns for cow protection or for the defence of the Hindi language, the Congress used a semantic and symbolic repertoire linked to Hinduism to mobilize popular support.
19 Jaffrelot considers Patel as a representative of the Hindu traditionalist movement. In this matter, Jaffrelot refers to the distinction proposed by Graham (1988) between traditionalism and Hindu nationalism. The Hindu traditionalists support the promotion of their community's culture, but without the xenophobic dimension characteristic of Hindu nationalism (Jaffrelot 1993: 87–9).
20 In 1964, after Nehru's death, secularism declined because the person who incarnated this principle was no more. In 1965, during the three-month war with Pakistan, state secularism in India was severely undermined by the suspicion with which Indian Muslims were treated by Lal Bahadur Shastri's government (Desai 2000: 114–16).
21 For a critical evaluation of the long-term legacy of Nehru's 'modernizing zeal', see Mitra 1991.
22 This term refers to the waiting period for a divorced woman during which she cannot remarry (or the period that must elapse before a widow is allowed to remarry). In case of a divorce, the husband has to provide for his wife's needs during this period, which is equal to three menstrual cycles.
23 This dispute began in the second half of the nineteenth century. See Engineer (1990) and Gopal (1993) for the full sequence of events.
24 In 1992, after a national campaign organized under the leadership of the VHP, *kar sevaks* (volunteer workers) arrived in Ayodhya and destroyed the mosque in a few hours. In the days that followed, riots broke out in the major Indian cities causing thousands of deaths. Violence was particularly devastating in Mumbai.
25 When the Congress came back to power at the Centre in 2004 (as part of the United Progressive Alliance government), Vaghela became Minister for Textiles.
26 There are a large number of studies on communalism: see, among others, Chakrabarty 2003; Chandra 1984, 1993: ch. 8, 1994 and 2004; Dumont 1966; Fox 1996; Freitag 1989; Kothari 1998; Pandey 1990.

27 This view is contested by pointing out the plurality of personal loyalties represented by gender, caste, class, ethnic, linguistic, regional or cultural groups, which do not necessarily correspond with religious affiliation and are not subordinated to it (see Chakrabarty 2003: intro. and Chandra 1984: 13–15). Somers and Gibson (1996: 55) also insist on the impossibility of explaining individual actions by referring only to a person's allegiance to *one* particular category, whereas he or she belongs simultaneously to several categories and is influenced by them.
28 Several analyses adopt a comparative view and present different cases of religious nationalism, among which one is Hindu nationalism: Juergensmeyer 1993; Kepel 1993; Rupnik 1995; Tétreault and Denemark 2004; and the five volumes of the *Fundamentalism Project* (Marty and Appleby 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2004). See also Fox 1996, which compares communalism with some European nationalist movements.
29 On the work of enumeration, classification and categorization done by the British and its contemporary relevance, see Cohn 1987 and Appadurai 1993 to quote only two references from a much richer literature.
30 The VHP is particularly active in this regard (see Chapter 5).
31 Regarding the redefinition of Hinduism by the Hindu nationalist movement, see Ilaiah 2003; Lochtefeld 1996; B.K. Smith 1996.
32 On the emergence and development of the Hindu nationalist movement and ideology, see Bayly 1998; Bhatt 2001; Casolari 2000; Frykenberg 1993; Jaffrelot 1993; Pantham 1995: ch. 5; Rajagopal 2001; Sarkar 2001; van der Veer 1994a; Zavos 2002.
33 Several detailed studies have been conducted on the RSS, analysing its ideology and its functioning; see, in particular, Andersen and Damle 1987; Basu *et al*. 1993; Jaffrelot 1993; Kanungo 2003; Mathur 2008.
34 This formulation comes from the previous version of the RSS website, which has now been changed.
35 Nathuram Godse, Gandhi's murderer, was a member of the RSS. He left it in the early 1940s to start his own movement, the *Hindu Rashtra Dal*. However, he remained close to the organization.
36 On the BJS, see Graham 1990.
37 Most of these organizations claim to be independent from the RSS, but a closer look shows that they are never totally disconnected (see Jaffrelot 2005a and Frykenberg 1993).
38 On the VHP, see Basu *et al.* 1993; Hellman 1993; Katju 2003; Mathur 2008; McKean 1996.
39 In their research, Ashgar Ali Engineer and Paul Brass followed this instrumentalist line of argument. Kapur (1993) studied the use of the god Ram by the Hindu nationalist movement (see also Udayakumar 2005).
40 The 'Hindi belt' covers the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Haryana, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand as well as the territory of Delhi.
41 However, there was not a direct and complete transfer of voters from the Congress to the BJP. Many voted neither for the Congress nor for the BJP but for regional parties.
42 The relation between the BJP and the RSS and the influence of the RSS on the BJP are fluctuating.
43 On the importance of the golden age in nationalist rhetoric, see Smith (1987: 191–200) as well as Raoul Girardet's stimulating essay *Mythes et mythologies politiques* (1986).
44 This idea is supported not only by Hindu nationalists but is commonly seen in the writings of Pakistani historians. In this respect, there is a parallelism between the

Hindu nationalist historiography and the Muslim communalist historiography practised in Pakistan. Both of them consider that the Muslims and Hindus who lived in the Asian subcontinent before Partition constituted two distinct nations (Udayakumar 2001a: 10; Habib 1997 FL). The existence of deep-seated conflicts between Hindus and Muslims is also supported by Western scholars. Notably, Marc Gaborieau has written an article entitled 'From Al-Beruni to Jinnah: Idiom, Ritual and Ideology of the Hindu-Muslim Confrontation in South Asia' in which he argues:

> I hold that the deepest sentiments of opposition, on which both the Hindu and the Muslim communities found their identity, are traceable throughout the nine centuries of Indo-Muslim history: from the first testimony of Al-Beruni in the end of the 11th century to the famous Pakistan resolution in March 1940 and the address pronounced by Jinnah on that occasion.
>
> (Gaborieau 1985: 8)

45 This view is defended, in particular, by Chandra (1984), Pandey (1990) and Das (1990).

46 This version of history is influenced by the ideals of the struggle for independence that are, in turn, strongly influenced by the ideals of the Enlightenment (Chatterjee 2001). Srivastava observes in this respect that:

> The national identity project in post-Independence India has largely been formulated and conducted by a relatively small group of political, social, and cultural functionaries. These may be characterized as the ideological heirs of the early nationalists who 'accepted as the basis of their thinking about the future of India many of the formulations of nineteenth-century British Liberalism' (Embree 1989: 134).
>
> (Srivastava 1998: 6)

47 In his history of the independence movement, Sumit Sarkar (1983) is more concerned with class struggle and economic exploitation during the Raj than with cultural and religious aspects of the national imagination (Mallampalli 1999: 167–8). Yet, the role played by religion in history finds more space in Sarkar's later studies (see esp. Sarkar 1996).

48 Numerous studies have been undertaken on the appearance and cause of conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in India. Bayly notes that most scholars agree that the last 30 years of the nineteenth century were a transitional period as regards the characteristics and incidence of communal violence. But he questions this argument on the basis of some archival evidence. He observes first and foremost that there were riots between 1700 and 1860 and that their nature and frequency did not change significantly after 1860 (Bayly 1985: 232–3). See also Eaton 2000, Lorenzen 1999 and Pollock 1993 who argue that the roots of communalism predate the colonial period.

2 Textbooks, teachers and students

1 In what regards the state 'prescribing' a certain 'common past', the role of commemorations can be mentioned. Since Nora's *Lieux de mémoire* (1984–94), there have been an increasing number of studies on commemorations and the part they play in the construction of the national past.

2 The classic works on the reproductive role of education are Durkheim's functionalist analysis, Talcott Parsons' structuro-functionalist analysis and Bourdieu

and Passeron's neo-Marxist analysis (for a critical overview, see Petitat 1999: intro.). However, the school is also a factor of change as shown by André Petitat (1999). This author does not deny the school's reproductive function, but he shows that the school is simultaneously productive and reproductive (Petitat 1999: 63). Michael W. Apple in his earlier work (following a neo-Marxist analysis) stressed the role of education in the reproduction of social inequalities (Apple 1979). Yet, later, he modified his position adding that schools are not only institutions of reproduction, as students reinterpret the social messages transmitted to them, accept them partially or even reject them completely (Apple 1985: 14).

3 The Planning Commission is another example of centralized modernization. According to Sunil Khilnani, during Nehru's time the Commission enjoyed 'an extraordinarily powerful position within the political system': 'Economic development was entrusted by Nehru to a small group: over a decade, the membership of the Planning Commission was drawn from a pool of only around twenty men' (Khilnani 1997: 81–2).

> The Planning Commission became the exclusive theatre where economic policy was formulated. The subject was removed from parliament and the cabinet – they were now merely informed of decisions taken by the small cohort of experts. The members of the Planning Commission were by no means all economists, but they were chosen by Nehru for their broad agreement with his political project: committed to 'socialistic' and reformist ideals, in the Indianized version of social democracy, and above all to a scepticism about the market and a belief that the state had to take responsibility for allocating resources in the economy.
>
> (Khilnani 1997: 85–6)

4 On the 'manufacturing' of citizens through schools, Véronique Bénéï (2008) demonstrated remarkably well the role played by the schools' daily routines such as the morning assembly, as well as by extra-curricular activities and, more generally, by 'all that is not the textbook'. In her fascinating study, she documents how the nation is born into existence and experienced at school through bodily practices and the production of emotional attachment.

5 This happens in all countries where teaching is based on textbooks; on the United States, see Ravitch 2004.

6 Krishna Kumar is an educationist who published extensively on the Indian education system and on the influence of politics on education (see esp. Kumar 2001 and 2005). In 2004, he was appointed director of NCERT and took part in the reforms of the education system implemented under the UPA government.

7 According to Krishna Kumar mass examinations constitute a (symbolic) counterbalance to the early selection by private schools.

> Whereas the strategy of early selection practised by the private education system continues to offer safe routes towards status professions to the children of the elites, mass examination offers to the rest of society the assurance that status can also be achieved through competition. So, while early selection is a 'reproductionist' force in Indian education, mass examination is a symbol of the possibility of change.
>
> (Kumar 1987: 33–4)

8 Middle-class parents now increasingly send their children for private tuition. The tutor is often a teacher in a government or private school who calls the children to her/his house for tuitions outside school hours, either early in the morning or

late in the afternoon or evening. Under the tutor's supervision the students memorize the answers to questions expected in the examination by repeating them after him/her.

9 Interview, New Delhi, December 2004.

10 This was the case with the 1988 Curriculum and is also true of the 2000 Curriculum with some infringements of the rule that the detractors of the reforms were quick to point out such as too much stress on ancient India and the attempt to minimize the importance of medieval India.

11 There are many studies on the conditions of education in India. For an overall view, see the ASER report 2008 (Pratham 2009) and Kingdon 2007.

12 On the quick development of the public sector in education, see De *et al.* 2002. On teacher absenteeism in government schools as a factor for parents choosing private schools and for the opening of new schools, see Muralidharan and Kremer 2008.

13 Drèze and Sen estimated that, already in 1994, 30 per cent of the children aged between 6 and 14 years in rural areas were enrolled in private schools and this amounted to 80 per cent in urban areas (Drèze and Sen 2002: 172).

14 Regarding the social implications of these parallel systems, see Faust and Nagar 2001 and Pathak 2002: 151–2.

15 Between 2000 and 2006, there has been a general increase in primary school attendance (for girls and boys, as well as for rural and urban areas) (Huebler 2007).

16 In the context of Hindu denominational schools, the institutions run by the *Dayanand Anglo Vedic* (DAV) *College Trust and Management Society* should also be mentioned. The first of these schools, which claim to be heirs to the legacy of Dayanand Saraswati (1824–83), founder of the *Arya Samaj*, was opened in 1886 in Lahore. This network consists of nearly 700 educational institutions (DAV 2009). The teaching material used in these schools seems to closely resemble that used in schools run by *Vidya Bharati* (GoI 2005: 58–63). On these schools, see also Kumar 1993a: 540–1, 550–1.

17 The Hindu nationalist movement is based on the idea of disinterested service or *sewa*, which should lead to the nation's consolidation. An article in the *Organiser* entitled 'RSS Building the Nation' emphasized the importance of service and sacrifice: 'The RSS inculcates in every person that the entire people from Kashmir to Kanyakumari are members of the same family and it is the sacred and bounden duty of every one to devote his time and energy in the service of his larger family and make necessary sacrifices for its total development' (Rao 2003 Org.). Regarding the practice of *sewa* within the different organizations that constitute the *Sangh Parivar*, see Beckerlegge 2004.

18 On the use of videos-on-wheels to diffuse the *Sangh Parivar*'s message, see Brosius 2005: esp. pp. 38–45.

19 Figures provided by Dina Nath Batra, vice-president of Vidya Bharati, during an interview in Delhi in January 2005.

20 Every year the *Vidya Bharati* organization holds tests on Indian culture open to all. The participants prepare themselves for the test with the help of a textbook, entitled *Akhil Bharatiya Sanskriti Gyan Pariksha Prashnottari*, containing short stories and questions and answers. The tests consist of questions based on the guidebook such as 'Why is the Babri Masjid not a mosque?' or 'How many times did foreigners invade the Ramjanmabhoomi?' (Sengupta 2004 *Countercurrents*). For a brief analysis of the supplementary textbooks used in *Vidya Bharati* schools, see GoI 2005: 56–8 and 61–5.

21 When the old NCERT textbooks were used, there were evident contradictions between their content and what the students in *Vidya Bharati* schools were learning

in extra-curricular activities and in the supplementary material elaborated to correct the history taught in the official books. The discrepancies were certainly alleviated by teachers' explanations as well as by the emphasis on the fact that the NCERT textbooks had to be learned for a utilitarian purpose (only): to get good marks (Sundar 2004).

22 There are over 9,000 schools affiliated to the CBSE and over 12 million students (CBSE website 2009).

23 Starting in 2011, the CBSE will replace the Class X board examination with an internal assessment.

24 This was the case of the Union Territory of Delhi but in 2004, following the controversy regarding the NDA textbooks, the state decided to prepare its own books. It came back to the NCERT textbooks from the start of the 2009 school year.

25 Textbooks for the primary level are generally the results of seminars in which teachers participate. For the secondary level, committees set up by the NCERT select scholars specialized in the field treated by the textbook and ask them if they are willing to participate and write a textbook. The NCERT also employs staff for each subject to assist the external authors and revise their manuscripts. Finally, at the end of this process, the books are subjected to external evaluation by teachers and scholars. Some textbooks are also written by members of the NCERT staff who are specialized in the subject in question (I thank Arjun Dev for explaining me how the NCERT was working).

26 Renan continues, '[T]he essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, but that they should have also forgotten many things . . . every French citizen should have forgotten the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre, the thirteenth century massacres in the South of France' (Renan 1996: 227–8). According to Anderson, the meaning to be given to the act of forgetting in this sentence is ambiguous as Renan refers precisely to the events that ought to be forgotten and expects the reader to be familiar with them. Moreover, Anderson observes that 'having to "have already forgotten" tragedies of which one needs unceasingly to be "reminded" turns out to be a characteristic device in the later construction of national genealogies' (Anderson 1999: 201). This so-called need to forget would thus actually serve as a reminder of the event.

27 However, certainly not all of these writers were Marxists (and even less communists, a conclusion often drawn too hastily by Hindu nationalists) (see Chapter 4).

28 In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, British historians developed an interpretation of history that was later described as Orientalist. The historian William Jones was a well-known proponent of this approach. Orientalism results from the 'essentialization' of the Orient opposed to the Occident (Said 1979). The Orientalists addressed a Western audience while Indians were only the inert object of their study. They looked at this 'object' as being completely external and opposed to themselves. The result of this approach was the construction of two essentialized entities: a spiritual India and a materialistic West (Prakash 1990: 384–5). Western scholars were mainly interested in ancient India, Sanskrit and religious texts. They believed that after this classical epoch, Indian civilization went through a long period of decline until the arrival of the British.

29 For example, during what is designated as the 'Hindu' period extending from 1000BC to AD1200, there were several major non-Muslim dynasties (the Mauryas, the Indo-Greeks, the Shakas and the Kushanas) that had Buddhist kings (Thapar 1999a: 7).

30 The Arabs conquered Sindh in the eighth century while the Turks controlled a part of Punjab from the eleventh century onwards. So, we can see from these few

examples that there is no single date to mark the establishment of Muslim rule in India.

31 At the end of the nineteenth century, in opposition to these imperialist readings of Indian history, Indian scholars such as H.C. Raychaudhuri, B. Prasad and R.K. Mookerjee proposed a nationalist reading of history (Chatterjee 1993: 98–102). They did not break free from the Orientalists' essentialist view of India, but they differed from the latter by considering the object of their study not as passive and inert but as active and sovereign. They saw national history as advancement towards the nation's political independence, finally obtained in 1947. India was imagined 'as an active and undivided subject that had found its expression in the nation-state and transcended class and ethnic divisions' (Prakash 1990: 388–90).

32 Aurangzeb shares the epithet of 'history's villain' with Sultan Mahmud of Gazni who invaded North India 17 times between the years 1000 and 1026.

33 Van der Veer shows that syncretism is not always synonymous with tolerance. Furthermore, he suggests that Sufism should not automatically be equated with syncretism (van der Veer 1994a: 36, 1994b). He also highlights the contemporary implications of the discussion on the syncretism of Islam as it is practised in India. Some authors have used this idea to prove the 'Indianness' of Indian Muslims (van der Veer 1994b: 203–4).

34 The Communist Party of India (CPI) held its first conference in 1925. Between 1930 and 1934, the Congress Party organized the civil disobedience movement in which the CPI did not participate following a directive from the Comintern forbidding it to take part in any mass political activity. In 1942, the CPI committed its biggest mistake according to Achin Vanaik (1986: 51) by opposing the Quit India movement. It did so following instructions from the Comintern that all action should be subordinated to the defence of the Soviet fatherland and its policy of alliances during the ongoing war.

35 The two-nation theory was supported by Jinnah (1876–1948), a Muslim political leader and the founder of Pakistan) as a reaction to the Hindu conception of the Indian nation. He believed that Hindus and Muslims formed two distinct nations and, therefore, demanded a separate state for Muslims.

36 ACK's perspective differed in some aspects from the one of the RSS, see Chandra 2008: 64–5.

3 The debate in context

1 The withdrawal also concerned two other books, one published in 1972 by the National Book Trust for the 25th anniversary of Indian independence (*Freedom Struggle* by A. Tripathi, B. De and B. Chandra) and one published in 1969 by the People's Publishing House (*Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* by R.Thapar, H. Mukhia and B. Chandra).

2 Regarding changes in education in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, see the 1992 issue of the *Seminar Magazine* dedicated to this topic; about Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, see Menon and Rajalakshmi 1998.

3 Behera (1996: 202) estimates that this concerned 1.2 million children and 40,000 teachers.

4 I thank Barun De for drawing my attention to this strategical reversal.

5 Uma Bharati occupied this post until the cabinet reshuffle in August 2002. She then became minister of state in the ministry of coal and mines. Her place in the ministry of human resource development (MHRD) was occupied by M. Verma, a member of the Rajya Sabha and president of the Madhya Pradesh unit of the BJP.

6 A statement made by Dina Nath Batra (General Secretary of *Vidya Bharati*) in connection with this recommendation was reported in the magazine *The Week* (1998):

> This is what we mean when we talk of 'Indianising and nationalising' education . . . The wisdom of the Vedas and the Upanishads must be made available to our children. The contribution of our ancients to physics, chemistry, architecture (the entire Vastu theory) should be appreciated. Vedic mathematics is taught outside India, but in India it is not taken seriously. Ayurveda is catching on in the West, while we disparage it and turn to allopathy.

7 A section of the press as well as NGOs expressed their concern about these appointments, which were described as the *Sangh*'s infiltration into educational and research institutions (Taneja 2000 *Akhbar*).

8 This case is interesting as it illustrates the tensions and contradictions within the *Sangh Parivar*. The new president, Manohar Lal Sondhi, was nominated by Atal Behari Vajpayee whereas the 12 members of the academic council were nominated by the HRD Minister, Murli Manohar Joshi (see Rajalakshmi 2001a FL; Mehra 2001 EPW). Tensions surfaced quickly between the protégé of the Prime Minister and those of the Minister of Human Resource Development. Sondhi was not perceived as a loyal supporter of the *Sangh Parivar* even though he had been a BJS Member of Parliament. These tensions within the ICSSR reflected disagreements between the BJP and the RSS. Sondhi was the protégé of Vajpayee, representative of the moderate wing of the BJP, while the members of the academic council were nominated by Joshi, who is closer to the RSS.

9 Under this project, launched in 1972, a number of volumes were to be published so as to bring together material from both official and private sources regarding the social and economic dimensions of the independence movement. It was intended to set forth an Indian perspective on the 10 years preceding independence as a response to British official accounts (put together in the 12 volumes entitled *The Transfer of Power 1942–1947*, edited by N. Mansergh, E.W.R. Lumby and Penderel Moon, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970–83).

10 In 2004, when the Congress came back to power at the Centre, the MHRD appointed a committee to report on the activities of ICHR and, particularly, on the decision to stop the publication of the two volumes of the *Towards Freedom* Project. This committee came to the conclusion that S. Sarkar and K.N. Panikkar had submitted the volumes for approval before sending them for publication (Rajalakshmi 2005 FL). It was then decided to publish these two books and to go ahead with the larger project.

11 It should, however, be noted that Rajput was a professor in NCERT for almost 30 years before becoming director.

12 The *Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust* (SAHMAT) was set up in the memory of a young Communist Party activist, theatre person and writer, Safdar Hashmi, who fought for social justice by putting up street-plays. He was murdered in 1989 while presenting the street-play *Halla Bol* (Attack) in Sahibabdad, an industrial area close to Delhi. SAHMAT is engaged in research and actions against communalism.

13 The education ministers of Karnataka, Rajasthan, Delhi, Pondicherry, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and West Bengal attended the conference and approved the final declaration.

14 The goal to universalize education had been proclaimed right from the time of India's independence in the directive principals contained in the Constitution stipulating that education should be free and compulsory for all children till the age of 14.

15 Moreover, a section of the curriculum is entitled 'Towards an Indigenous Curriculum':

> Adequate attention shall have to be paid to the country's cultural plurality and the enormous amount of wisdom and experience that can be drawn from the

various regions and sections of the Indian society. It may also mean making judicious use of and drawing from traditional knowledge systems and solutions to issues of health, water management, population explosion etc. At a time when there is worldwide recognition and patenting of items like *neem* and turmeric, this kind of information must become an integral component of learners' knowledge.

(NCERT 2000: 37)

16 It is often stressed in the Hindu nationalist discourse that the indigenous education system was highly developed before the coming of the British. Two books are usually mentioned in support of this claim: *The Beautiful Tree* by Dharampal (1983) and *One Teacher, One School* by Dibona (1983). These books partially reproduce the results of the surveys conducted in the 1820s and 1830s by the governments of Madras, Bombay and Bengal on the spread and nature of the indigenous education system. Dharampal concludes, in the light of these studies, that the level of education of the population went down during the colonial period and Dibona argues that indigenous institutions were better suited to the country's needs and should have been maintained.

17 Macaulay's name has been used to coin the terms 'Macaulayism' and 'Macaulayites'. Elst defines the Macaulayites as

those Indians who have interiorized the colonial ideology of the 'White Man's Burden' (as Rudyard Kipling called it in a famous poem): The Europeans had to come and liberate the natives, 'half devil and half child', from their native culture, which consisted only of ignorance, superstition and the concomitant social evils; and after this liberation from themselves, these Indians became a kind of honorary Whites.

(Elst 2001: 25–6)

18 Some opined that the curriculum did not take into account the situation of education in India and that there was an insuperable gap between its avowed objectives and the resources available. Others drew attention to the inclusion of fashionable concepts having no coherence with the project as a whole, which might indicate that their use was essentially rhetorical (see the articles published in 2000 in the special issue of the *Seminar* magazine *Redisigning Curricula*).

19 Vedic mathematics is mentioned only once in the curriculum: 'The students may be encouraged to enhance their computational skill by the use of *Vedic Mathematics*' (NCERT 2000: 57). Yoga or 'yogic' exercises are mentioned several times in connection with physical education (see NCERT 2000: 47, 49, 73, 74).

For a critical analysis of the origin and utility of Vedic mathematics, see the articles reproduced in SAHMAT and Sabrang 2002: 90–103, also see Meera Nanda's book (2003) on the Hindu nationalists' approach to science (which she compares with the approach of postmodernist authors).

20 Interview with Barun De, Calcutta, January 2007. A 'pandit' is a Brahmin who has memorized the Hindu sacred texts.

21 The arguments advanced by the NCERT for promoting Sanskrit resemble a toned down version of the arguments presented in 1957 in the Sanskrit Commission's report. The Commission felt that Sanskrit was *the* national language because of its 'naturally' unifying nature and that it would help the nation regain its power. The issue of the place to be given to Sanskrit among the other Indian languages (whether it should be predominant or not) can be traced to the debates in the Constituent Assembly (1946–49), which considered and then rejected the proposal for making Sanskrit, and not Hindi, India's official language (Ramaswamy 1999).

22 Education about religions must be handled with extreme care. All steps must be taken in advance to ensure that no personal prejudice or narrow minded perceptions are allowed to distort the real purpose of this venture and no rituals, dogmas and superstitions are propagated in the name of education about religions. All religions therefore have to be treated with equal respect (*Sarva Dharma Sambhav*) and that there has to be no discrimination on the ground of any religion (*Panthnirapekshata*).

(NCERT 2000: 20)

23 The filing of this petition in the Supreme Court as well as the one regarding the introduction of astrology as a subject in universities is part of the judicialization of social relationships and of the political field. The higher courts, particularly the Supreme Court, are increasingly called upon to play the role of arbitrator during political crises.

24 The petitioners were social activist Aruna Roy, educationist Meena Krishna Tyabji and journalist B.G. Verghese.

25 The portion of the petition relating to secularism referred in particular to the sentence of the curriculum associating religion with value ('what is required today is not religious education but education about religions, their basics, the value inherent therein and also comparative study of philosophy of all religions').

26 Lovely became education minister of the National Territory of Delhi in December 2003 after Sheila Dikshit's re-election as Chief Minister.

27 Quoted in Muralidharan 2001 FL. The textbooks put back in circulation in 2004 with the mention 'for reference only' no longer contained this passage.

28 The term 'beef' is to be understood in its wider sense as also including cow's meat.

29 D.N. Jha published in 2002 the study, *The Myth of the Holy Cow*, dealing mainly with the consumption of beef by Hindus and Buddhists in ancient times. The author received death threats and Hindu nationalist groups filed a case against him in a court in Andhra Pradesh.

30 Visweswaran *et al*. (2009: 104) note that: '[w]hile the implementation of the NCF curriculum on a national level was stayed by the Supreme Court on 1 March 2002 . . . states with BJP governments were already implementing changes to social science and history textbooks that followed the broad guidelines of the NCF 2000 curriculum'.

31 See the collections of articles published by SAHMAT (2002a, 2003).

32 *India and the World* for Class VI by Makkhan Lal *et al.*, *Contemporary India* for Class IX by Hari Om *et al.*, *Ancient India* for Class XI by Makkhan Lal, and *Medieval India* for Class XI by Meenakshi Jain.

33 The textbooks contain numerous typographical, linguistic, chronological and factual errors. This heading comprises the factual errors that cannot be imputed to what the opponents of the reform call ideological bias. Factual errors are the result of inaccuracy, but cannot be ascribed to a recognizable tendency to portray an event in a particular way.

34 The criticism concerns the overload of information, the inappropriate content as compared to the age of the students for whom the textbooks are prescribed, the superficial way in which events are treated and the absence of any linkup between events (see, in particular, the criticism by NCERT 2004: 11–12). Regarding the overload of information, the chapter on the 1857 Revolt in the book *Modern India* for Class XII contained more than 150 names (NCERT 2004: 18). However, these pedagogical problems were already present in the old textbooks (see Kumar 2001).

35 The plagiarized book is *World Civilizations. Their History and their Culture* by R.E. Lerner, S. Meacham, A.T. Wood, R.W. Hull, E.M. Burns and P.L. Ralph. This textbook was published in 1955 and reprinted nine times. It also has an Indian edition.

36 The RSS has a contradictory attitude to Gandhi. On the one hand, Hindu nationalists have a strong antipathy towards Gandhi and his philosophy of non-violent protest that they believe is cowardly and effeminate, but, on the other hand, they try to co-opt him so as to increase the popularity and accessibility of the Hindu nationalist movement.

37 Kumar criticizes the textbook written by Arjun and Indira Dev. Arjun Dev returned the criticism a few years later. In 2004, Kumar became director of NCERT. He was also an advisor for the preparation of the Class VIII history textbook for the territory of Delhi, which had decided to bring out its own textbooks (until then it had used the NCERT textbooks). Arjun Dev published a critique of this textbook in which Gandhi's assassination is only mentioned briefly on the last page of the text (Dev 2005 CC).

38 Apple studied the curriculum and the textbooks used in the United States. He believes that in the school environment any mention or representation of social conflicts is systematically avoided (Apple 2004: ch. 5). Gyanendra Pandey's observation (2006: ch. 2) about the treatment of communal violence in India's colonial and postcolonial historiography follows the path indicated in the analyses by Kumar and Apple. Pandey analyses the historiographical representation of mass violence in India and concludes that these conflicts are treated as aberrations and are, as a consequence, marginalized and removed from the main fabric of the historical narrative.

39 We can note that one of the passages censored from the 'old' textbook on ancient India presented the caste system as hereditary:

> In course of time varnas or social classes and *jatis* or castes were made hereditary by law and religion. All this was done to ensure that vaishyas produce and pay taxes and shudras serve as labourers so that brahmanas act as priests and khsatriyas as rulers. . . . The lower orders worked hard in the firm belief that they would deserve a better life in the next world or birth. This belief lessened the intensity and frequency of tensions and conflicts between those who actually produced and those who lived off these producers as princes, priests, officials, soldiers and big merchants. Hence the necessity for exercising coercion against the lower orders was not so strong in ancient India. What was done by slaves and other producing sections in Greece and Rome under the threat of whip was done by the vaishyas and shudras out of conviction formed through brahmanical indoctrination and the varna system.
>
> (Sharma 2004: 240–1)

40 This sentence is astonishingly similar to one of Golwalkar's sentences in *We or Our Nationhood Defined*. Golwalkar writes:

> To start with: The life of Nations is not to be counted in years. What days are in the life of man, years or even centuries may be in that of Nations. Especially so in the case of the Nation of Hindusthan. Whereas with the exception of China, all the chief Nations of the world today can trace the history of their civilized life (I should say Semi-Barbaric life) and go back at best a couple of thousand years, we can not say when, at what particular point of time, we in Hindusthan discarded the state of nature and started an ordered, civilized, national existence.
>
> (Golwalkar 1947: 8)

41 On this debate, see Thapar 1999b, Trautmann 2006 as well as Edwin Bryant's remarkable book (2002).

42 Sharma in the textbook on ancient India for Class XI (2004: 71) advances the argument of Aryan migration:

> A little earlier than 1500 BC the Aryans appeared in India. We do not find clear and definite archaeological traces of their advent. . . . The Aryans migrated in India in several waves. The earliest wave is represented by the Rig Vedic people, who appeared in the subcontinent in about 1500 BC. They came into conflict with the indigenous inhabitants called the *dasas*, *dasyus*, etc.: Since the *dasas* are also mentioned in the ancient Iranian literature, they seem to have been a branch of the early Aryans.

43 The defence of the indigenous origin of the Indo-Aryans is a key issue in the Hindu nationalist historiography. However, not all nationalist discourses look for 'local' roots. Hence, even though the nation's origin is always 'immemorial', some nationalist discourses draw their pride from the external origin of the nation's ancestors. Berti (2007, n.6) thus points out that African historians often find prestige in the foreign origins of their peoples.

44 The issue of the origin of the Aryans is so crucial for Hindu nationalism that there is a special organization of the RSS dealing with it. The *Bharatiya Ithias Sankalan Yojana Samiti* (Committee for Collecting Historical Material about India) is in charge of collecting local historical material to show how it fits in with a pan-Indian Vedic history (regarding this organization, see Berti 2006 and 2007).

45 For a favourable analysis of M. Jain's portrayal of the medieval period, see Rosser 2003: 461–524.

46 In 2005, the three-year term of the members of the ICHR came to an end. The MHRD appointed 18 new members. The president appointed by the NDA government continued in his post but the remaining members were appointed anew. B.B. Lal, Makkhan Lal, S.C. Mittal and Hari Om were among the outgoing members (Joshua 2005 TH).

47 The members of the commission were Professors S. Settar, J.S. Grewal and Barun De. They evaluated the textbooks *India and the World* (Class VI) by Makkhan Lal *et al.*, *India and the World* (Class VII) by Sima Yadav *et al.*, *India and the World* (Class VIII) by Savita Sinha *et al.*, *Medieval India* (Class XI) by Meenakshi Jain and *Modern India* (Class XII) by Satish Chandra Mittal.

48 The commission recommended that some textbooks brought out by private publishers should replace the NDA textbooks. It mentioned the old textbooks but it did not include them in the list of books to be used as replacements that was annexed to its recommendations.

49 This was the case in Gujarat, Orissa and Rajasthan. The textbooks introduced in 2006 by the Rajasthan Board of Secondary Education (during the Vasundhara Raje-led BJP government) were accused of containing 'extreme right-wing propaganda' (IE 2009).

50 The SBAS filed two other public interest litigations in Delhi High Court: one regarding the depiction of Muslims in the social science textbook for Class VIII as 'promoting discrimination and hatred' and one concerning a sociology textbook and its 'negative portrayal of women while erroneously quoting the Rigveda' (Kumar 2008b Org.).

51 The California state Board of Education provides the overall curriculum framework. The Curriculum Commission is responsible for controlling the content of the textbooks but the elaboration and production is left to private publishers.

In 2005, books from nine publishers were reviewed and the HEF and VF sought changes in all of them.

52 The website of 'Friends of South Asia' (30 April 2006) contains links to a selection of newspaper articles about the debate as well as two tables detailing the controversial edits.

53 The website of the 'Let India Develop Campaign' presents a collection of articles supporting this point of view.

54 Here are the two paragraphs about Nazism:

> In World War I, Germany was disgracefully defeated. At the end of the War, the unjust Treaty of Versailles was imposed on it, and this insulting treaty angered the Germans very much. Patriotic youth organized to take revenge of it. Hitler, a soldier of Germany in World War I, took leadership of them. Hitler established Nazism in Germany. In thinking of Nazism, there is co-ordination of nationalism and socialism. On death of Hindenburg, the President of Germany, Hitler held that position and established dictatorship in Germany. Hitler adopted aggressive policy and led the Germans towards ardent nationalism. His policies gave birth to the World War. The Nazi soldiers were wearing blue dress and were adorning the symbol of 'SWASTIK'. They considered Hitler as their "FUHRER" (Saviour).
>
> Due to severe nationalism of Italy and Germany and their aggressive policy, the nations of the world thought of forming groups. France made peace agreements with small European countries. As a remedy thereof, Italy, Germany and Japan made a group of Axis. Germany made treaty of peace with Russia. As a result, democratic group of France and England was formed. Due to this group formation, all the nations started production of arms. As the League of Nations failed to prevent their lust of expanding imperialism, World War II became inevitable.
>
> (Shukla *et al.* 2005: 11)

55 The social science textbook for Class X in use since 1993 has also been criticized for presenting fascism and Nazism in a positive way and for not mentioning the Holocaust. The BJP has been seen as responsible for these distortions as well.

4 Enemies and defenders

1 Bhattacharya (2008) shows very well how this process operates, analysing secular historiography.

2 Most of these writers, who are amateur historians, practise history during their leisure time. They are trained in the exact sciences and work in the scientific field.

3 These authors share an idealized ('reactionary Orientalist', according to Heehs 2003) view of Hinduism. They believe that it is necessary to defend and restore the lost glory of Hindu culture, which has been denigrated and attacked. Elst, Frawley and Gautier have been particularly prolix on the issue of the origin of the Indo-Aryans. They have written books and several articles opposing the idea of an Aryan invasion. Gautier is a French journalist and writer (based in India). In 2003, he proposed to build a 'Hindu Holocaust Museum' (Gautier 2003 Rediff). Frawley is an American who has embraced Hinduism and set up the *American Institute of Vedic Studies* in Santa Fe. Elst, who describes himself as an intellectual not affiliated to any institution, obtained a doctorate from the Catholic University of Louvain. The subject of his research was Hindu 'revivalism'. According to Chetan Bhatt, the last two authors are influenced by the extreme-right *New Age* ideology, which is a source of support and a channel for diffusing Hindu nationalist theories (Bhatt 1999: 77–8).

4 The CPI broke up into two groups in 1964: the CPI and the CPI(M). The latter represents the politically more significant group (for an overview of the CPI's history, see Vanaik 1986 and Zins 2001).

5 R.S. Sharma, R. Thapar and B. Chandra were professors in JNU's Centre for Historical Studies.

6 Postcolonial studies as a whole adopted a position against imperialism and Eurocentrism. Among the notable authors in the field of postcolonial studies, we may mention Chinua Achebe, Aijaz Ahmad, Bill Ashcroft, Homi Bhabha, Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, Salman Rushdie, Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak.

7 Meera Nanda (2003) and Zaheer Baber (2006: ch. 1) exposed what they saw as a dangerous synergy between these two tendencies. The argument of Nanda is mainly based on 'hard' sciences. This historian of science draws a parallel between Vedic science and the postmodernist approach to science. Her argument is, nevertheless, also valid for historiography. With regard to Baber's criticism, it concerns the anti-secular scholars (in particular T.N. Madan, Ashis Nandy and Veena Das). According to him, although these authors are not communalists, 'their fashionable and smug critiques and outright dismissals of modernity, rationality and secularism have dovetailed rather dramatically with the ascendancy of the BJP to power at the Center' (Baber 2006: 13). On the indigenization project, see also note 14 below.

8 She refers to the following passage: 'Ashoka was one of the greatest kings in the history of the world. His reign constitutes one of the "rare and lighting epochs in the annals of nations"' (Lal 2002: 131).

9 Other scholars experienced the dangers of displeasing the Hindu Right. D.N. Jha (after the publication of *The Myth of the Holy Cow* (2002)) as well as James Laine (after his book on Shivaji was published (2003)) found themselves the targets of hate campaigns.

10 The Left refuted this argument by claiming that its choices in the field of education and research had never been guided solely by its ideological sympathies but had always respected the criterion of academic excellence.

11 Rajput wrote:

> The inventors of the controversy over the 'communalisation' of Indian history are at it again. Since the early Seventies, they've been campaigning against historians who disagreed with the Leftist-Marxist view of India's past, which, thanks to official patronage, became the dominant school of historiography. . . . Across the world, school-level textbook writing is left to professionals. But the scheme of our 'eminent historians' was not entirely didactic; it was about 'mind control'. . . . If anything the NCERT has thrown open Indian history to scholars of all ideological hues. Independent scholars are breathing easier and the selection to major positions is no longer the prerogative of a selected few.
>
> (Rajput 2004 HT)

12 Arun Shourie is a journalist (he was editor of *the Indian Express*) and a prolific writer. He was first seen as an independent intellectual whose ideas were close to Hindu nationalism and he only later became a member of the BJP. He was a minister under the BJP-led coalition government and then a *Rajya Sabha* member of the BJP. The adjective 'eminent', which has sarcastic overtones here, is commonly used in the press particularly to describe some of the Left-leaning historians. Borrowing the same epithet, Shourie gave his book the title *Eminent Historians. Their Technology, their Line, their Fraud* (1998).

13 Berti (2007) draws our attention to the fact that the denunciation of the distortion of national history by the West and the appeal to the development of an indigenous

historiography capable of producing a feeling of national unity are expressed in similar terms in nationalist discourses in Africa (Berti refers to T. Falola, 2004, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals*, New York: University of Rochester Press). A parallel can also be established between this search for an indigenous historiography and what Edward Said calls 'resistance culture' (Said 1994: 252–65).

14 The plea for an Indian historiography free from Western influences is in line with the anti-Orientalist movement inspired by the works of Edward Said (1979, 1994). The 'indigenisation project' (Baber 2002) was championed by a variety of actors and took several forms. One of these forms has found expression in academic research, particularly in the social sciences where writers have rejected the Eurocentric academic discourse (Vandana Shiva, T.N. Madan, Ashis Nandy and Frederique Marglin to quote only a few). Another form of reindigenization has also been championed by the Hindu nationalist movement. We have seen it through its discourse on history, but this project has also been advocated on a larger scale in the field of the exact sciences. This indigenization project is thus supported by two 'groups' who otherwise defend entirely different conceptions of society. According to Meera Nanda (2003), the Hindu nationalists benefited from this connection and the legitimacy conferred on the project by its inclusion in a wider movement that sought to rediscover and reassert the value of 'indigenous' knowledge (see Baber 2002 who, while supporting the basic idea, draws attention to the problems raised by a dogmatic application of this approach).

15 The principal zones of conflict were situated at either end of the 2000-kilometre-long border between India and China, namely the Aksai Chin plateau in the west and the McMahon Line in the east (Guang 2004: 402).

16 See Chhaya 2002 RoN, Shourie 1998: 63–86. For a more thorough evaluation, see Banerjee 2007.

17 The fear of communists and the trauma of Partition are the two central concerns of the older *Sangh Parivar* members who have lived through the independence struggle and the cold war period. Partition is still present in their minds since they belong to the displaced generation. However, we may assume that this will be a less sensitive subject for the next generation, though it is not quite certain as even things belonging to the distant past are capable of rousing passions. However, communism certainly appears less of a threat to the next generation.

18 It would, nevertheless, be wrong to limit this conception to the Hindu nationalist discourse because categorizing Muslims as 'Others' is very common and not peculiar to Hindu nationalism. Pandey stresses the importance of Partition in the definition of Indian identity *as opposed* to the Muslim identity. He explores what he calls the conceptual split between Hindus and Indians on the one hand and Muslims and foreigners on the other (Pandey 1999: 621).

19 The status of Muslim Indians, treated by a certain discourse in India as the 'enemy within', has similarities with the representation of Israeli Arabs in Israel. Many Israeli Jews see Israeli Arabs (about 20 per cent of the population) as the 'enemy within', citizens that they should guard against and potential allies of the Palestinians in occupied territories (International Crisis Group 2004; regarding the impact of this perception on the education system see in particular Abu-Saad 2006).

20 John Zavos (2001) draws attention to a similar externalization process in the *Sangh Parivar*'s discourse about Christians.

21 This 'confusion' constitutes a central element of the discourse of the *Sangh Parivar*. It is very often repeated in speeches and articles. For example, the *Sarsanghchalak* Shri Mohan Bhagwat, speaking in Jammu to celebrate the 57th death anniversary of Dr Mookerjee, began by saying that the term *Hindutva* refers to the common identity of the people living in India, 'the roots of which lie deep in Sanatan Dharma'. He then explained that 'when we say we are Hindus, we are

not referring to a particular religion, we are referring to loyalty to a nation, which embraces one and all irrespective of the fact what language they speak or which mode of worship they practice' (quoted in Kant 2009 Org.).

22 'Resident non Indians' refer to the special status of *Non Resident Indians* given to persons of Indian origin living abroad.

23 The frequent mention of this point in the collection of articles brought out by SAHMAT in 2002 illustrates its importance. If we just consider the first pages of the collection, we can read: 'the BJP and its wider constellation of ideological allies have kept up an insidious campaign to subvert *the fundamentals of secularism*' (6); 'Prof. Irfan Habib said this was yet another attempt *to subvert the secular basis of the constitution*' (7); 'Continuing their criticism of the BJP-led Government's alleged attempt to "saffronise education", eminent historians of the country today called for a movement to *stop rewriting history without a "scientific and secular approach*"' (SAHMAT 2002b: 14, emphasis added).

24 On this issue, the feminists advocating a uniform civil code found themselves in a difficult position as they were defending the same position (for different reasons) as the Hindu nationalist (see Tharu and Niranjana 1996).

25 See Cossman and Kapur 2001: 63–9; for a detailed criticism of this argument, see Nanda 2003: 48–61.

26 The *Sangh Parivar* holds Muslims responsible for the mutilation of the body of *Bharat Mata* who symbolizes the motherland. Hindu nationalists also accuse communists of jeopardizing national unity. Atul Rawat (2004: 33) feels that their aim is to dismember India into 16 principalities that they can dominate.

27 For an argued use of the term fascism to describe Hindu nationalism, see Ahmad 1999.

28 It is irrefutable that historians like Romila Thapar and Irfan Habib enjoy greater national and international academic credibility and visibility than someone like Hari Om of whom little was known in India before he wrote the textbook.

29 Some of the prolific Hindu nationalist historians are Sita Ram Goel, K.S. Lal and Ram Swaroop.

30 For a different secular approach, see Bhattacharya 2009.

31 We may note the author's optimism in claiming that we continuously question our beliefs. Psychological research, however, points out that we select the elements that agree with our pre-existing beliefs (Corneille and Leyens 1999).

32 Bakaya proposes a different interpretation of this image:

> Apart from the point that the spiritual significance of Shiva's trident cannot be left to the RSS or the VHP, such precise, measured 'scientific' approaches to questions ultimately concerning the meaning of life are arbitrary. The deployment of a geometrical instrument against the trishul seems to assume that a positivist study and mastery of the world – despite the suffering it has wrought, not least of all under 'scientific socialism' – is an ambition inherently superior, say, to mystic quest.
>
> (Bakaya 2004: 43)

33 The destruction of the Ram temple by the Mughals is part of a larger narrative about the destruction of tens of thousands of temples, oppression of Hindus and the general decline of civilization during the 'Muslim' period. (According to Richard M. Eaton (2002: 257), professor of history, it is possible to document the desecration of 80 temples during the period 1192–1729).

34 Regarding the definition of borders – blurred, inexistent, porous or impermeable – between myth and history, political roles and uses in general, see Füredi 1992 and

Girardet 1986. Regarding the debate in India, see the excellent book by Lal (2005) as well as the one by Udayakumar (2005), particularly the chapter 'Ramayana: Historicizing Myth and Mythologizing History'; see also Bhattacharya 2009.

35 Rajaram has been a professor of engineering in the United States. He became known during the 1990s as a 'revisionist historian' supporting Hindu nationalist theories. Jha is a scholar from Farakka, in West Bengal.

36 See Lal 2005; for a critical view of the monopoly enjoyed by history as a legitimate means of accessing the past, also see Nandy 1995 and Pathak 2002: 152–4.

37 In her analysis of Amar Chitra Katha, Nandini Chandar (2008) shows well how myth and history live under the same roof.

38 See Bhattacharya's analysis (2009) on secular history and what he calls 'the rhetoric of facts'.

39 The mediation between modernity and tradition is sometimes realized through the different organization of the *Sangh Parivar*. One organization can defend modernity while another supports tradition. This is what enabled the BJP to follow a liberal economic policy even as the RSS continued to defend the idea of economic nationalism through the consumption of *swadeshi* goods (Biswas 2004).

40 For a study on how modernity and tradition meet, overlap and transform each other (through caste, Gandhi's personality and law), see the by now classical study of Rudolph and Rudolph (1967).

41 Mallampalli (1999) notes that there could be, for example, a hybridization of these religious identities with non-religious identities pertaining to caste, region or language.

42 According to Mallampalli (1999: 187), the accommodating attitude of Hinduism (thanks to its 'tolerance') has enhanced its inclusive character so that it embraces even those who wanted to escape the oppression of the caste system by converting to other religions. Seen from this angle, Hindu 'tolerance' is not a liberal concept but a ploy that has enabled the Hindus to claim an absolute majority. When Hindus were orthodox, segmented and exclusive, they constituted only a part of the nation, but by becoming 'tolerant' and universalist, they have become the nation.

43 The oil-lamp is widely used in various rituals, particularly the *arati* (fire ritual) performed during *puja*.

5 Perspectives and silences

1 In his essay 'In Defence of the Fragment', Pandey ([1992] reproduced in Pandey 2006: ch. 2) uses the term 'fragment' to designate two different 'universes'. I am referring here to the first one that he describes as '[t]he fragments of Indian society – the smaller religious, caste, and tribal communities, industrial workers, unemployed slum dwellers, and activist women's groups' (2006: 18). The second concerns a particular type of historical source generally neglected by historians such as 'a weaver's diary, a collection of poems by an unknown poet (and to this we might add all those literatures of India that Macaulay condemned. Creation myths and women's songs, family genealogies and local traditions of history' (2006: 42). Regarding the notion of fragment, see also Chatterjee 1993.

2 The *old textbook* contains 84 illustrations, of which 59 represent a person, usually alone but sometimes as part of a group, who has been at the forefront in politics. Only 25 pictures depict scenes whose main subject is not a person but a demonstration, a landscape or a text. The *NDA textbook* contains 42 illustrations representing single individuals with just one exception (a copy of the telegram announcing the release of Musai Singh). In both books, the majority of pictures represent 'great men'. This omnipresence of 'historical figures' contradicts, at least in the iconography, the foreword to Chandra's book where the then director of

NCERT (K. Gopalan in 1990) wrote that '[this book] lays emphasis on forces, movements and institutions rather than on details of military and diplomatic events, and on the biographical details of individual administrators and leaders' (Chandra 2004: iii).

3 Regarding this term, the NCFSE says:

> Education ideally must prepare students to face the challenges of life. For this, it needs to be intimately linked with different life-skills, the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life, by developing in them generic skills related to wide variety of areas such as health and social needs.
>
> (NCERT 2000: 17)

4 In the same perspective, Udayakumar observes that the desire – expressed in the 2000 Curriculum – to assess not only the intelligence quotient of children but also their emotional and spiritual quotient, in order to spot the more gifted children is only a devious way of promoting the inequalities caused by the caste system. According to him, the message that shows through these suggestions is: 'if you are a Dalit, you are born deficient. If you are a Brahmin, you are deservingly so. Do not try to change it; accept it; and get on with life' (Udayakumar 2001b).

5 However, the introduction of vocational education in the school syllabus is not a new idea. Gandhi's 'basic education' programme was based on the learning of a craft. This was seen as enhancing the value of manual work, which was associated with the lower castes, and it also provided financial, and thereby political, independence to the school (Kumar 1993b). The curriculum drawn up in 2005 stresses the importance of establishing a link between work and education, but the suggestions are rather cautious and the document mentions the dangers and the limitations of work in school (NCERT 2005: 58–61).

6 For a history curriculum corresponding to this perspective, see Deshkal Society 2007.

7 'The curriculum as a whole should help in promoting development in the pupils of a profound sense of patriotism, non-sectarian attitudes, capacity for tolerating differences arising out of caste, religion, region, language, sex, etc. and ability to choose between alternate value systems' (NCERT 1988: 5).

8 However, not all north Indian languages are derived from Sanskrit. Some (mainly tribal languages from eastern India) are part of the Munda groups of languages of the Austro-Asiatic family and others (from north-eastern India) are part of the Sinaitic family.

9 This depiction of rural life evokes the late nineteenth-century colonial idealized conception of the village as a self-contained community and refers indirectly to the agrarian hierarchy that is designated as the *jajmani* system (on both these representations of the village in India, see Madan 2002: 1–26).

10 On high and low cultures see Gellner (1983).

11 The following account of *Ekal Vidyalayas* is based on the material I received in January 2005 at the foundation's headquarters in Delhi. I was also able to observe the working of an *Ekal Vidyalaya* in Mashineya village in Ajmer district in Rajasthan in January 2005.

12 Interview *Vidya Bharati* headquarters, New Delhi, January 2005.

13 The *Ekal Vidyalaya* organization has a rigid hierarchical structure similar to the RSS. The first level is the village (*Gram*) in which there is one school. The second level (*Upsanch*) covers 10 schools, the third level (*Sanch*) covers 30 schools and the fourth level (*Sankul*) 90. Above these are the regional level (*Anchal*) covering 270 schools, the state level (*Prant*), the zonal level (*Kshetra*) and finally the central level (*Kendriya*) (Gupta 2004: 13).

14 See Searle-Chatterjee 1994; Froerer (2006) who studied this process in a village in Chhattisgarh; and Mathur (2008) about Rajasthan.
15 These numbers come from Chatterji (2009: 124). She explores how Hindu militant groups mobilized people against Christians and especially Christian Dalits in Orissa. She also documents the violence unleashed by these groups.
16 This is regulated in the *Constitution (Scheduled Caste) Orders (Amendment) Act 1990*: 'no person who professes a religion different from the Hindu, the Sikh or the Buddhist religion shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste'.
17 Incidentally, Ilaiah (2003: xi) believes that the Dalits share more practices with, and feel closer to, the Muslims than to the upper castes (also see Searle-Chatterjee 1994: 19–21).
18 Regarding the distinction between provincial towns and metropolitan cities, see N. Kumar (2006).
19 The portrait of Ambedkar is the same but the portions of history with which it is related in the textbooks are different. In Chandra's book, Ambedkar appears at the end of the narrative, at the time of the framing of the Constitution. In Mittal's book, more space is dedicated to Ambedkar. The text presents who he was in relation to the 'communal award'.
20 Dalits also converted to Christianity, Sikhism and Islam (regarding Dalit Muslims, see Sikand 2004: chs 8 and 9).
21 In a later analysis, Ilaiah (1999b) counts Nehru among the representatives of Hindu nationalism. Ilaiah believes that the Gandhian Hindu nationalist discourse 'seeped' into the Nehruvian state and contributed to its foundation, despite the fact that Gandhi's sentimentality and religiosity caused Nehru much discomfort and embarrassment. Ilaiah also claims that the secular state became the private property of the Brahmanic castes due to a conscious effort by the elites in Nehru's time.
22 According to Ilaiah, what distinguishes upper-caste members of the Communist Party from those of upper-caste parties is the simple fact that the former are more dangerous because they cannot be easily recognized. In this context, he quotes Kanshi Ram's metaphor describing the former as green snakes in green grass and the latter as white snakes in green grass (Ilaiah 1999b: 41, note 31).
23 In 1978 the government set up a commission under the chairmanship of B.P. Mandal. This commission 'had to determine the criteria defining the OBCs and to recommend measures, such as reservation in the administration, which could contribute to their social emancipation' (Jaffrelot 2003a: 320). In its report submitted in 1980, the commission recommended that 27 per cent of jobs in government service should be reserved for OBCs.
24 The division of roles between men and women is a key element in the definition of a nation. In the last 20 years, a growing number of studies have been devoted to the place of women in nationalist discourses and, more recently, a stream of complementary research has highlighted the corresponding construction of masculinity. Several books have shed light on the importance not only of female fertility but also on male strength in the nation's imagination.
25 On the representations of masculinity and femininity in Hindu nationalism, see Banerjee 2005, Chopra *et al.* 2004, Jayawardena and Alwis 1996, Rajan 2006 and Sarkar and Butalia 1995.
26 In 2000, Murli Manohar Joshi defended the compulsory teaching of Sanskrit to students of Classes X to XII by claiming that Sanskrit is the mother of all Indian languages (Joshi quoted in Bidwai 2001a).
27 See the very rich iconography of Bharat Mata produced at this period and presented in the wonderfully illustrated book by Neumayer and Schelberger (2007). See also the account and the analysis proposed by Chakrabarty (2000: ch. 6) of Nehru's meeting with peasants who greeted him with shouts of '*Bharat Mata ki jay*' (victory to Mother India).

28 Usha Menon (2003) agrees that women did take part in the violence perpetrated by Hindu nationalist organizations but she refutes the idea that this movement was responsible for a large-scale mobilization of women.

29 However, it enrolls candidates mainly from poor or low-caste families, which may explain why these women are more readily exposed to danger: 'To the RSS the sanctity and protection of the female body from public exposure and physical danger is, obviously, less important in the case of lower caste women' (Hansen 1995: 91–2). See also Eckert (2003) on the *Mahila Aghadi*, the women's wing of the *Shiv Sena*.

30 A lot has been written on Gandhi's understanding of secularism and on whether he can be called a secularist. On this question, I follow T.N. Madan who shows well that Gandhi was defending a certain conception of secularism but that his understanding, and what it implied regarding the relation between state and religion, was very different from Nehru's position and Nehru's understanding of secularism (see Madan 1993).

31 For this reason, Gandhi is often accused by the Hindu nationalists of having 'emasculated' the Hindus.

32 Yet, the references based on Hindu myths commonly used by Gandhi have largely excluded Muslim women whose participation was, however, important during the Khilafat movement (Taneja 2005: 79–88).

33 At the same time, Subhas Chandra Bose put forward a conception of women and their role totally different from Gandhi's and inspired not by the goddess Sita but by Durga. He created a special women's regiment, the *Rani of Jhansi Regiment* (Hills and Silverman 1993).

34 However, the story does not end here. Years after Sita's return to Ayodhya and, despite the proof offered by the fire ordeal, Ram banished her from the kingdom because rumours were proliferating about her chastity. Sita lived in the forest and, after many years, Rama proposed to bring her back. Sita refused and asked mother earth to swallow her. Ram's harshness towards Sita disturbed authors and audiences for many centuries and the rendering of these episodes varied greatly (see Hess 1999).

35 The mythological character of Savitri embodies the same kind of ideal womanhood as Sita. Savitri knew that her husband was fated to die within a year but she still insisted on marrying him, renouncing the luxury of her palace to follow him in poverty. Then when Yama, the god of death, took away her husband, she followed them.

36 I do not want to grant too much importance to the counting of images but the scarcity of illustrations depicting women is nonetheless significant.

37 Tantia Tope played an important role in the 1857 uprising. He was in the service of the former *peshwa* (ruler) of the Maratha Confederation, Baji Rao and his adopted son, Nana Sahib (who also occupied a prominent place in the events of 1857). Tantia Tope came to Rani Lakshmi Bai's help when Jhansi was besieged by British troops. However, this help was not enough to turn the situation in the Rani's favour and they lost Jhansi.

38 Here is how Rani Lakshmi Bai is presented in the old textbook:

> One of the great leaders of the Revolt of 1857, and perhaps one of the greatest heroines of Indian history, was the young Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi. The young Rani joined the rebels when the British refused to acknowledge her right to adopt an heir to the Jhansi *gaddi*, annexed her state, and threatened to treat her as an instigator of the rebellion of the sepoys at Jhansi. The Rani vacillated for some time. But once she had decided to throw in her lot with the rebels, she fought valiantly at the head of her troops. Tales of her bravery and courage and military skill have inspired her countrymen ever since. Driven out of Jhansi

> by the British forces after a fierce battle in which 'even women were seen working the batteries and distributing ammunition', she administered the oath to her followers that 'with our own hands we shall not our *Azadshahi* [independent rule] bury'. She captured Gwalior with the help of Tantia Tope and her trusted Afghan guards. Maharaja Sindhia, loyal to the British, made an attempt to fight the Rani but most of his troops deserted to her. Sindhia sought refuge with the English at Agra. The brave Rani died fighting on 17 June 1858, clad in the battle dress of a soldier and mounted on a charger. Beside her fell her life-long friend and companion, a Muslim girl.
>
> (Chandra 2004: 114–15)

It may be noted that in this short description the author made it a point to mention Rani Lakshmi Bai's friendship with a young Muslim girl. This information is not found in the NDA textbook.

39 The paragraph on the Queen of Jhansi in Mittal's textbook is as follows:

> In Jhansi, Rani Lakshmi Bai fought a fierce battle with the British Army. After being defeated by Sir Huroze [*sic*], she proceeded towards Kalpi. She seized Gwalior, with the help of Tantiya Tope. The ruler of Gwalior, Scindia remained loyal to the British and took shelter in Agra, but on 17 June 1858, the Queen became a martyr while fighting bravely.
>
> (Mittal 2003: 107–8)

40 On the 'invisibility' of women and 'mothers and non-mothers', see Nita Kumar 2005.

41 This type of national imaginary creates different roles for men and women especially when it is a matter of 'supreme' national commitment, which consists of risking one's life to defend one's country. Sharp (1996) illustrates this idea by analysing the responses of Americans to women soldiers recruited during the Gulf War. The reactions were especially strong when Col. Rhonda Cornum was captured and subjected to sexual assault. Although she minimized the importance of what happened and always maintained that women should be enlisted in combat units, the danger of a woman soldier being raped by the enemy is one of the reasons used to justify the absence of women from the front line (this is also true of the Indian Army). 'Prevention of foreign penetration of the motherland – and women's bodies as symbols of it – is at the heart of national state security. The female is a prominent symbol of nationalism and honour. But this is a symbol to be protected by masculine agency' (Sharp 1996: 100).

42 In a monograph on the nation's feminine iconography in eighteenth-century France, Landes (2001: 2) argues that the nation's female form played a part in the male citizens' attachment to the 'national body'. On emotional attachment to the nation through the mother figure in India, see Bénéï (2008: ch. 3).

43 This argument was first developed in Landes 1988.

44 Studies carried out in Europe came to conclusions similar to the one presented here about the preponderance of men in history textbooks' illustrations. Osler studied history textbooks published in England in 1991–92 and she observes that the majority of pictures in all textbooks show men, so much so that in some cases the ratio is 26 pictures of men to one picture of a woman (Osler 1994: 223). The authors of a report on the representation of men and women in French schoolbooks observed the same imbalance even though the state and several associations have taken measures in this regard since the 1970s (Rigault and Richert 1997).

45 An article in the *Times of India* suggested that the new attention to gender stereotypes in textbooks is intended not only to promote equality but also, more directly, to remedy the decrease in the number of baby girls (Ghosh 2006 ToI).

46 According to Chakrabarty (2000: ch. 6), the practice of *darshan* gives a special importance in India to the fact of 'seeing the nation'. The term *darshan* refers to the interaction between the devotee and the deity's image when the former looks at the latter. The devotee looking at the deity's picture or statue is blessed by the latter (regarding the practice of *darshan*, see the excellent book by Diana Eck published in 1985).
47 I borrow the distinction made by Hoffmann (2001: 111–12) between proto-nation and nation-in-the-making. However, Hoffmann uses the term proto-nation to describe the nation as it is seen not by Hindu nationalists but by the nationalists of the 1920s. The latter, imagined a secular proto-nation while Hindu nationalists imagine a Hindu proto-nation.
48 The term *Mahajanapadas* refers to the 16 kingdoms that flourished in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent during the sixth century BC. The Nandas ruled over one of these kingdoms, namely Maghada. Their army was so big and powerful that Alexander the Great decided not to attack them.
49 In S. Chandra's textbook, out of 34 illustrations 8 represent tombs, 6 forts, 5 temples, 4 mosques, 3 palaces and 2 coins. Jain's textbook contains 51 illustrations of which 15 represent Hindu temples, 6 forts, 6 tombs and 3 mosques.
50 This movement resulted from the dissatisfaction of Muslims in India with the British Middle-East policy. The Indian Muslim movement in support of the caliphate (the Sultan of Turkey was the 'commander of the believers') became more radical in May 1920 after the signature of the Treaty of Sèvres dismembering the Ottoman Empire. Under the instigation of two Muslim leaders, the Ali brothers, the Central Khilafat Committee decided in Allahabad in June 1920 to launch a non-cooperation programme.
51 The NDA textbook contains a part on Muslim politics that is not found in the old textbook ('Muslim politics and nationalist movement', Mittal 2003: 193–205).
52 Gold 1994, Jaffrelot 1993 and Zavos 2002 deal with the influence of religious reform movements on the emergence and development of Hindu nationalism.
53 For an analysis of the figure of the martyr as an important element in the Hindu nationalist discourse, see Brosius 2005: ch. 6.
54 This brief section is, however, illustrated by three pictures: Shyamaji Krishna Varma, Madame Bhikaji Cama and Ajit Singh (Chandra 2004: 199–201). Savarkar is mentioned in the text but there is no picture of him.
55 Regarding the absence or the partial historiographical treatment of Partition-linked violence in general, and in the textbook *Modern India* by B. Chandra in particular, see Pandey 2006: ch. 2. Pandey observes that most history books treat incidents of collective violence as aberrations or exceptions.
56 Regarding Subaltern Studies, see in particular the 10 volumes brought out by Oxford University Press; as for historiographical reflections on gender, see the articles in the section '*genre et histoire*' (gender and history) of the collection of essays *Enjeux contemporains du féminisme indien* (Haase-Dubosc *et al.* 2002); for an overview of the topic, see Forbes 2003; regarding the Dalit viewpoint in Indian historiography see, in particular, the bibliography provided by the February 2006 issue of the monthly *Seminar* devoted to the Dalit perspective.

General conclusion

1 For example, a reading of Brosius's analysis (2005) of the videos produced between 1989 and 1993 for the BJP by Jain Studios shows numerous similarities in what regards the main themes and the way they are 'emplotted'.
2 I thank Christophe Jaffrelot for drawing my attention to the necessity of emphasizing the plurality of the 'third positions'.

3 Among the recent Indian films that could have influenced the representation of some historical personalities and events in the audience's mind, we may mention Ketan Mehta's *Mangal Pandey: The Rising* (2005) on the 1857 revolt, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra's *Rang De Basanti* (2006) about a group of students who get involved in the making of a film on the revolutionary activities of Chandra Shekar Azad and Bhagat Singh, and Rajkumar Hirani's *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (2006) in which Gandhian philosophy plays a key role.
4 This relationship between nation and region is likely to vary according to the state under consideration, its history, its geographical location as well as its institutional links and its 'proximity' to the centre or its antagonism towards it.

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